Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I’m conducting an oral history interview with Richard E. “Dick” Moser. And today is February twenty-fourth 2006. We’re both sitting in the interview room in the Vietnam Archive on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. And it is approximately 1:40pm Central Standard Time. Dick, I’d like to start with some background information about yourself and talk a little bit about your family, growing up, and if you would first of all acknowledge that we did, before we started this conversation, discuss the interview agreement and the legal disclosure and that you’re aware of legal ramifications of certain statements in the interview as well as the fact that you’re doing the interview; it is a donation to us and you do agree to make it publicly accessible.

Richard Moser: I do agree and I fully understand.

RV: Very good. So if you could, tell me where you born, when you were born and then a little bit about your growing up.

RM: Well, I was born in 1935, June of 1935 in Ashville, North Carolina. I was the third by a significant gap of three children. I had a sister who was about fourteen and a half years older than me and a brother who was eleven years older than me and that becomes significant when we enter the 2nd World War period. So I grew up for all practical purposes almost an only child because my brother and sister were—my brother was off in World War II and my sister was off following the war and married early in the
war and her husband was overseas in Europe. So they were gone from home by the time I was old enough to really be aware of them. My sister was a babysitter for me when I was very young, I’m told, but she was gone by the time I started school. So essentially I grew up as an only child, basically. My father was in the plumbing and heating business and later, air conditioning business and my mother worked with him in that family business. In my teenage years, in high school, I began to work in that business fairly early when I was about twelve and certainly the summer I was thirteen, operating a tractor-mounted back-hoe ditch digging machine to dig ditches for plumbing contracting jobs and also subcontracting to contractors to dig footing ditches for buildings and things like that. So I began working really at about age twelve or thirteen in the hot sun in the summertime, operating a ditch-digging machine.

RV: That’s a lot of responsibility for a twelve or thirteen year old.
RM: Well, it was, yeah. Yeah. I had a, I guess you would say, mechanical aptitude early on for machinery and could coordinate my hands to handle the levers of a ditch digging machine.

RV: And later on, an airplane.
RM: Yeah.

RV: Was this something your father requested of you and wanted you to do or was this something that you kind of got into yourself and asked if you could assist?
RM: I don’t know how to answer that really. Pretty early on it was kind of understood, which will become significant I think as we develop this, that I would probably go into the family business. I grew up around a plumbing shop and knowing all the employees of my dad’s company of which in the very early years there weren’t that many. So I just kind of grew up in the plumbing shop and when the company acquired this ditch digging machine that mounted on a farm tractor, I just learned how to operate it. I guess, I don’t know, one Saturday morning come summertime, my dad says, “Hey, let’s do this for the summer job,” and so I did and that’s what I did through the summer well through my freshman year of college.

RV: Tell me about your father. What was he like?
RM: Very highly respected individual. He was president of the Lion’s Club; he was president of the local congregation of the Lutheran Church. My family was all
Lutheran. I am now Baptist and have been for fifty years but I grew up in a Lutheran Church. So my father was a very highly respected member of the community. We were certainly not a wealthy family but we didn’t want for anything. As I mentioned earlier, my brother, being eleven and a half years older than me—and I don’t remember the exact details—but he enlisted in the Marines. He was born in 1924 so he enlisted in the Marines about ’42, early in the war when he was just barely legal. In fact, I’m not sure but he may have fibbed about his age early on. I just don’t remember from those years.

RV: He’d be right around eighteen.
RM: Yeah, he was right around eighteen. He had a May birthday and he went in just about his eighteenth birthday if not before.

RV: Why the Marine Corps?
RM: I don’t know. I don’t know. I might add, by the way, that I subsequently went to college and was the first one in my family to go to college. My father and my brother and my brother-in-law were certainly not college—never went to college. In fact, my mother only went through the ninth grade of education. So my privilege to go to college and to be earmarked to go to college I counted as a pretty rare privilege early on. So my brother—

RV: I’ll just say, tell me about your mother before we talk about your siblings. I’d like to know her personality, what she was like.
RM: She worked in the plumbing company with my dad after I was school age. It was a loving family but not a very affectionate family. I don’t remember—I’m very much a hugger and a touchy-feely guy and I’m not sure where that came from because my parents were not that way. Of course they were somewhat older. I was born relatively late. My mother was—I was born in ’35 and she was born in 1900 so she was thirty-five when I was born. My dad was thirty-eight when I was born so I was a relatively late child. It was a good, secure family build on Christian principles. They didn’t drink or run with people that did although my dad rose to be an officer and one year the president of the North Carolina Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors so they were thrust into somewhat of a social environment because of his statewide responsibilities.

RV: He sounds like he was a leader, a natural leader.
RM: He was a community leader. He was never a politician or any kind of—I wouldn’t say a strong dynamic leader but I think he was president of his Lion’s Club way, way back when I was still a child. Like I said, he had several offices in the North Carolina Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors. He had several responsibilities, he was on two or three boards of the city—Smoke Abatement Board and things relating to his profession and what would now be ecological responsibilities. Of course that word wasn’t invented back then. So my family life was relatively uneventful as I say. For practical purposes I was an only child. My brother, being a Marine, got into some heavy combat. He was on Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Tarawa, 4th Marine division, all of which were significant battles of the war. My brother-in-law—my sister married in 1942. I was seven and her husband was in the Army. He was in Europe. My brother, being in the Pacific with the Marines, my brother-in-law was in the Army in Europe and I remember very vividly the little banners we had in the window in those years of homes where sons or family members were overseas and I remember my mother was a chronic worrier always, and I think the toll of having a son and son-in-law in the war took a heavy toll on her. Her health was never real good. She had polycystic kidneys and she wasn’t a sickly woman but she was never real well, never real strong. My mother living through my brother and brother-in-law being in World War II I think later became a factor when I became in the military. So I grew up in high school, had a very normal life, dated quite a few girls, I was fortunate enough to have a car fairly early on. In fact, I learned to drive well before I was sixteen and drove illegally the company trucks.

RV: For the business?
RM: For the business and things like that.
RV: Can you describe Ashville and what it was like in the 1930s and 40s?
RV: Ashville at the time was population at around fifty thousand. Very much a Southern city. There was racial discrimination. I remember very clearly drinking fountains for colored and for white and separate restrooms, colored women, white women, colored men, white men, segregated lunch counters and all of that. In fact, one vivid memory I think that might be worth noting here, interjecting here, because my mother worked we had a maid over the years—several different maids. But during the time that I was about—again, not quite legal to drive but driving anyway—maybe
fourteen, we had what we called then a Negro maid, a black maid, who was part of our family. We just loved her. She loved us. And I drove her home after supper. She would cook supper, do the dishes and at seven, seven-thirty at night I took her home which was across town in another part of town described by the N-word in those days. And I won’t forget, and it’s shaped my life since then, I came back one evening from taking—her name was Josie—taking Josie home. She was relatively young and in retrospect I would say an attractive young black lady, probably in her mid or late twenties and I was fourteen or so. So I came home from taking this maid home and my dad said, “Son, I need to talk to you.” So he called me aside and he said, “I’ve got a call from Mrs. Busybody in town”—and by the way, Josie always rode in the front seat of the car by me. And Mrs. Busybody—I don’t know her name and could care less—called and expressed an opinion to my dad that she didn’t think it looked appropriate for the son of one of the city’s prominent businessmen to be seen with one of those N-word people in the front seat of the car with him. And so we talked about that. My dad took that with a grain of salt but it really impacted me and it made me realize for the first time—and again I’m a fourteen-year-old kid. What do I know? But I finally realized, I suddenly realized, “Something’s wrong with this. I mean, this is Josie we’re talking about. This lady and her predecessors changed my diapers and I’m driving her home and there’s something wrong with that?” So that really opened my eyes to discrimination and the real world that we lived in and I think it shaped my view and considering the part of the country that I’m from and where I grew up and the environment I grew up in, I think very early on after that incident I became much more open to other races and other cultures than I might have been had that experience not rang my bell.

RV: Was the problem with the fact that she was in the front seat with you and/or the problem that you were driving her into her part of town at your age?

RM: I don’t recall the details, of course. That’s been sixty-five years ago—well, fifty-five years ago—but I think it had to do with her being in the front seat with me. And this busybody lady recognized me as being my father’s son and so anyway, that made an impact that opened my vision to a wider world than I had been used to in Ashville, North Carolina. I went to a segregated high school, which interestingly enough, at the time was named Lee H. Edwards High School, named for a revered principal that
had passed away—Mr. Edwards—and it had been Ashville High School early on when
my sister attended that high school, and brother. When they attended, it was Ashville
High School. When I attended it, it was Lee H. Edwards High School. Well, through the
years later on, with integration and the change, it became very much integrated to where
whites were the minority. They later changed the name back to Ashville High School.
And I’m told—because I haven’t been back there very much over the years but this was
some twenty years after I graduated I guess—they changed it back to Ashville High
School because my family told me that the black community was unhappy that the school
was named for a white principal. And that again, when I heard that account, again it
made me realize what a racially segregated and biased and prejudiced world we live in
because a thought like that blew me away. So anyway, I finished high school. I wasn’t
real smart but I was smart enough and had pretty good grades.

RV: Tell me about your grades and what were your favorite subjects and your
least favorite?

RM: Distinctly, my favorite subjects were Sciences and Math. I was good at
Math. Chemistry, Physics, I took all that the high school offered in terms of the sequence
of general Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics. The same with Math. From Algebra 1,
Algebra 2, Plane Geometry—Solid Geometry it was called then—Trigonometry. We
didn’t have elementary Calculus in high school then so that was all the Math that my high
school offered. Incidentally, it was a class of about two hundred and fifty as I recall.
Two hundred and fifty-six I think was my class so it wasn’t a real big high school but it
wasn’t a small rural school, either. It was a good medium high school.

RV: How about sports?

RM: I did not participate much in sports. I tried a little track early on in the tenth
grade or so but I didn’t have the stick-to-itiveness that it took so I was not an athlete by
any means. I wasn’t a sissy but I wasn’t an athlete.

RV: Sure, sure. What about your hobbies? What did you enjoy doing outside of
school, outside the work, the business?

RM: I think mechanical things. Frankly, I enjoyed the work I was doing in the
summertime, you understand. I didn’t like—I never learned music. I can’t read music to
this day. I enjoy listening to music but I’m musically illiterate. I didn’t read. I’m not a
reader. Until I retired five years ago, I bet I hadn’t read ten books in my life for pleasure. I’ve only read necessary texts and things necessary for education. So I really don’t have hobbies. I’m a people person. Now I do pastoral ministries in the hospital and people have described me as being a people person. My second career after the Air Force was in real estate business and I think I did that because I was a people person.

RV: Where did that come from?
RM: I don’t know. My dad was somewhat of a people person. My mother was not necessarily. In fact, she definitely was not. She was very quiet and a relatively withdrawn person so I don’t know where that came from but it just developed over time. So moving on through high school it was presumed—by the way, my brother and brother-in-law are home from the wars after World War II.

RV: Right. Did they talk to you about that at all? Did you ask them?
RM: Not much. But I’ll enter some thoughts here later on. They both came back from the war having not been to college in 1946 and went into the family business. Well I’m still in high school. In fact, I’m in junior high school. I graduated from high school in ’53 so seven years before I graduated from high school they went into the family business. My brother kind of took up the plumbing aspect, my brother-in-law the heating aspect, and air conditioning was just in its infancy, certainly for residential use. But as it came, began to get into air conditioning, began to become a field, it became sort of understood that I would go off to college and get a degree and uniquely enough there were only two colleges in the country at that time that offered a degree in Heating and Air Conditioning, one of them being North Carolina State College. It was a college then, not a university. It became a university I think in the mid sixties, some ten years after I graduated. It was presumed pretty early. My father didn’t dictate it, it was the way it was going to be, like so many kids grow up I guess. They’re going to follow in their father’s footsteps or whatever but I was going to have the change to go to college and I was going to major in Heating and Air Conditioning, which I did.

RV: And then come back?
RM: And then come back and go into the family business. Now not realizing at the time, the timeline of that whole sequence of events, my brother and brother-in-law would have had eleven or twelve years in the business by the time I graduated from.
college and not realizing how awkward that might have been to try to be the young
upstart college graduate coming back into the family business. So I go off to North
Carolina State College, enrolling in Heating and Air Conditioning, which was in the
Mechanical Engineering Department, but my degree actually reads Bachelor of Science
in Heating and Air Conditioning. So I don’t know nothing from nothing about military.
So I go to registration. Of course those were the days of long registration lines and way
before computer days. It’s a land-grant university, North Carolina State is. ROTC is
required for two years. So I go down to registration and I know little or nothing about the
military and ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). Not very much. The Korean War,
by the way, is just over by this time. It’s 1953. So I find out I’ve got to take ROTC.
Well, I didn’t know that. I don’t think my dad knew that. So there’s two lines forming to
register for ROTC, a long line and a short line. The long line is the Army and the short
line is the Air Force. So I get into the short line.

RV: Don’t tell me that’s how you went into Air Force.
RM: That’s how I went into the Air Force.
RV: That’s amazing.
RM: Because it was the shortest line to registration. So I register for ROTC, I
take the first two years of ROTC, which is required, and in the process of that or course
you’re taking physical, you’re taking aptitude test, psychological profile tests, and it was
determined that I was pilot-eligible. So I began to reason, “Well, when I graduate—the
draft of course still existed—I’ll probably have to go into the military. I might as well go
as an officer.” So I said, “What the heck? Let’s sign up for advanced ROTC.” It was
my junior year, of course. So I take advanced ROTC.

RV: What did your parents think about that? It’s another step.
RM: It’s another step. I don’t think they realized the impact of it. Of course, one
of the first questions, “Well, what does that obligate you to?” I think the answer was—I
don’t know if I told them—but the obligation was four years after pilot training if you
went through and successfully finished pilot training. So it was basically a five-year
commitment. And I know my mother didn’t like that at all because anything Army and
military she didn’t like. She had worried through two sons, or son and son-in-law,
through World War II. My dad was, I think, much more receptive to me plotting my own
life which I really didn’t plot very well. My life just happened as we’ll see more as we
go along. But anyway, I got into advanced ROTC and all the things that go with that. I
became a Squadron Commander in ROTC my senior year.

RV: Let me stop you. I was going to ask you, were your people skills and
obviously your leadership skills, were they coming out this early on and how did you
work into that military lifestyle?

RM: Well, I fit into it pretty well. I had not had an interest in History until I
began to take ROTC and Military History and got interested in that phase, in that aspect
of History. By the way, to back track a little about what my interests were and were not
in high school, my interests were not English. I wasn’t a reader of literature. I always
got crib notes for all the classics that I had to pass and do the minimum to get by with
English compositions and all that stuff. But Science and Math was my forte and that’s
what I enjoyed, that’s what I did and I liked it. So I got into engineering school. I was
doing well. The classic situation of wearing a slide rule on your belt, dangling from you
belt as all engineering students did in the 1950s. Incidentally, I might add
parenthetically, North Carolina State had at that time—well, when I graduated it was
right at four thousand students, of which twenty-eight were females. It was essentially an
all-male school. It was Engineering, Agriculture, and Textiles and so those were all-male
domains back then. So there were only a handful of women students in the whole
university. Now of course it’s much like Texas Tech, twenty-eight or thirty thousand
students and at least fifty-fifty female.

RV: Yeah, it’s getting close to forty thousand. Let me stop and ask you. It’s
something we didn’t really cover. Tell me about your social life growing up and then the
dating years and then in college as well.

RM: In the dating years I dated several different girls over time. Back in those
days we had dances that we went to, the various little High-Wi and the girls’—
RV: Sadie Hawkins?

RM: Cheerios and whatever they called them back then, the girls’ social clubs and
the guys’. So I went to quite a few dances and was a pretty good dancer. I never went
what you would call “steady” with any one girl although I had several girls that I liked
pretty well along the way. I finally remember my very first date.
RV: (laughs) You want to tell me about that?

RM: A girl named Ann. That was in the ninth grade, my first official date. I’ve seen her since, by the way. I saw her at my thirty-fifth high school reunion and her husband, the guy she married, I knew but I hadn’t seen him other than that. So I guess what you call a relatively active social life.

RV: Well, do you want to tell me about the first date? What did you do?

RM: Well, it was before I could drive so I think my dad drove us and dropped us off at the movies. Ashville was a small enough town that we could walk to her home from the movies. In fact, I walked all over town. Of course, in those days you weren’t concerned about security in the nighttime hours and so I walked all over. The dates I had before I was sixteen and could legally drive, I walked home from dates and walked dates home from the movies and so on, depending on how close they lived. It was that small of a town. So I think I had a very good high school experience. I was certainly not a lover-boy sort of a guy but I had lots of good friends, lots of good dates, lots of friends that were girls.

RV: Even in Raleigh when you were there?

RM: Yes, in Raleigh. I dated in Raleigh quite a bit, girls from Meredith College. Meredith College is in Raleigh and I dated some Meredith girls. So, let’s go back to ROTC graduation. Well, where are we?

RV: Well, you had joined, in your junior year, the senior ROTC.

RM: Yeah, advanced ROTC.

RV: And you’re going to go into—well, I wanted to ask you one specific question. I know you’re going to take a summer of kind of your basic training, if you will. Can you tell me about that?

RM: Yeah. Let me back up. I graduated from high school in ’53 went off to college the fall of ’53. The summer of ’54 I worked with my father’s plumbing company in Ashville between my freshman and sophomore year. Is that right? Yes. And during that summer, I met my wife. She was born and raised in Miami, Florida. She was a good friend of a female cousin of mine who lived in Miami, Florida. And so my wife, whose name is Rosalind, and her sister and this cousin friend came—and by the way my wife is four years older than me so I’m eighteen, nineteen and she’s twenty-three. They came to
North Carolina to get away from the heat of Miami, Florida, which even before air-conditioned days was a little bit cooler because it’s in the mountains. And so we met in the summer of 1954. That relationship developed pretty quickly. I went back to Miami later that summer and saw her just before school started in the fall. We dated by mail my sophomore year. We corresponded a lot by mail and I was dating other people. The summer after my sophomore year I went to Miami and worked in Miami, Florida with an air conditioning company and lived with my aunt, the mother of this cousin. And that summer we became engaged. And this is the summer before my junior year. Well, by this time I had made the decision to take advanced ROTC and Rosalind, my fiancée, my girlfriend, fiancée, and subsequent wife is aware that we’re going in the military. I’m going presumably to pilot training and if I make it through pilot training that I’m going to have at least four years. So that factor is on the table now.

RV: How did she feel about that?
RM: She’s ready. “Good, let’s do it.” So we were married in January of my junior year. We were on the quarter system then or whatever system it was that we finished exams and had three weeks of classes after Christmas.

RV: That’s exactly what it was, a quarter system.
RM: We finished exams in late January. So we were married January twenty-eighth of 1956, which was midway of my junior year. So I finished the junior year. I had the summer camp of ROTC the summer between the junior and senior year and she got a job, by the way, first with the state—Raleigh of course is the state capital—she got a state job, a secretarial job downtown for a semester or maybe through that summer. I don’t remember exactly how long and then she later got a job at the School of Textiles on campus for our senior year. So anyway, she stayed in Raleigh while I went to ROTC summer camp and that was the usual summer camp basic.

RV: Was it there in Raleigh?
RM: No, no. I think I went to MacDill in Tampa, Florida, as I recall. I’m pretty sure it was. Yeah.

RV: How did you do?
RM: I did all right. Again, I was not an athlete but I handled the physical rigors and all that went with it. Of course, more and more there’s more testing and profiling
towards pilot training and so on. We go back to Raleigh for my senior year. Oh, by the way, the balance of that summer, I worked with a plumbing contractor. This is the summer of ’56 after I married. I worked with a plumbing contractor there in Raleigh and believe it or not I got some responsibilities for dynamiting. They were building a big Coca-Cola plant and discovered some sub-surface rock. As we were digging ditches and footings we found a lot of rock and we begin to have to blast it and I learned how. Of course by this time I’m almost a college senior and the people I’m working with are blue-collar types and so I’m the senior guy (laughs). I’m the smart guy on the project. So the boss teaches me and I forget how it all unfolded but I began to operate the drills to drill on the rock and plant the dynamite and now how to plant it and how much to plant and where it went and hit the plunger and everything and blast the rock out so we can do the trenches for the footings and for the sewer lines and those kinds of things. So it was kind of an interesting sideline for that summer preceding my senior year. So we go into the senior year and I graduate from college in May of 1957. Commissioning was the day before, May twenty-sixth as I recall. No, May twenty-fifth, commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant Reserve ROTC. The next day was graduation day and by then we had our orders—I think we did—that I would go into pilot training some time after the first of the year. So I took a job, we went through the interviewing process and I interviewed for and took a job with IBM at Poughkeepsie, New York. And by the time graduation came the Air Force moved their timetable up for reasons that I didn’t know at the time or don’t remember if I did know. They moved the timetable up so I ended up never going to that IBM job. I corresponded with them and told them that my entry date into the military had been advanced and so as it turned out I entered the Air Force in eighteen August of 1957, which is not quite two months after finishing college. So during those interim two months I forget what I did but I tried to generate a little revenue doing something. By this time, by the way, my wife is pregnant with our first one so she lived with her parents in Miami, Florida while I went to “pre-flight,” they called it then, at Lackland, reporting eighteen August, 1957 which became my promotion of service date which is the anniversary date by which things pivot. That was six weeks there. We were subsequently assigned to primary pilot training in Bartow, Florida, which is just east of Tampa about forty miles. That’s a civilian contract school for T34 and T28. We got
there early October, I guess. Our first child, my son Rick, which by the way, is Mindy’s
dad, was born December twenty-first of 1957 in Bartow, in a little one-horse hospital
there. I don’t know, a six-bed hospital maybe, a little country hospital in the midst of my
pilot training. It was at Christmas break of the pilot training so I was able to be around.

RV: It worked out well.

RM: It worked out well.

RV: How did you feel, having now a son and knowing you’re in the military,
having the family experience of wars going on and your mother’s worry? And now
you’ve put Rosalind and she’s going to be the mother with the child, you’re in the
military and there are wars upcoming. You don’t know yet.

RM: Don’t know yet.

RV: Did that change your perspective?

RM: Not yet. Of course, the Korean War is over. Vietnam has not fired up.

Well, it hadn’t fired up then. So as far as we know then, we’re going to be finished pilot
training, be in the Air Force four years and go back home to the family business. So we
got on to basic training at Webb Air Force Base in Big Spring, Texas, which of course is
subsequently closed. I graduated from there. That’s T33 training, jets. I graduated from
there in fourteen October of ’58 and got an assignment. But the way, but this time I’m
discovering that I’m not really a fighter pilot. I could be but I’m not as some people are
hot to be. But for some reason I’m fascinated by the B36, which was the monster of the
day and the big airplanes—cargo planes. The old reciprocating engine cargo planes kind
of fascinated me—the old C124 and some of the big old transport planes of that day.

RV: Can we back up or can we stop right now? I do want to talk to you about
flying, your first experience and what that was like and how you look to it—if you were a
natural or you really had to work at it.

RM: Let’s backtrack a little bit. My senior year in college, they had I believe, the
very first year or maybe the second year of a program where you get local training, forty
hours I think, in a Sesna-172, and it was basically a screening process to find out early on
who just flat couldn’t cut it or who got airsick or whatever. And it was really designed to
screen out a few folks before—of course pilot training is a continuous screening process.

You can drop out, wash out at any time. So I did get forty hours and subsequently a
private license there in Raleigh in the spring of my senior year in college. So I think
eight hours is the minimum and I soloed at the earliest time.

RV: Was it relatively natural for you? Did you enjoy it?

RM: Yeah, I think so. I enjoyed it, it was natural. Again, I never fancied myself
or never dreamed of being a red-hot fighter pilot but I became convinced in my own mind
that, “Hey, I can do this. I’m going to be a pilot. I’m going to fly for at least four years
and go home to the family business.” So it went well. I never really sweated check rides.
I don’t think I ever failed any check rides that I recall at any stage of pilot training. So I
was a good, average, maybe slightly above average pilot. I was not a hot-rod but I
certainly didn’t struggle to get through the program.

RV: Do you remember your first time you flew by yourself and what that was
feeling like?

RM: Of course that first time was in that Sesna-172. You have your first solo in
every airplane along the way but I don’t think I ever…I just don’t have fond memories of
it being fearful or being an adrenaline rush. It was just what I did. This is what you do.
You get eight hours and you solo. I think I bragged about it a little bit. You know how
that goes. I wouldn’t say it was a historic event. So I go through pilot training.

RV: Well, can you describe the T34 and the T28?

RM: The T34 is a Beach. Obviously you’re not familiar with that. Or are you?
Or are you just asking rhetorically?

RV: (laughs) Well I’m asking rhetorically just for folks listening to this interview.

RM: For folks listening?

RV: Yes.

RM: The T34 is a low-wing, the earliest trainer the Air Force used at that time
that was subsequently first replaced by the T37. I think we got, I want to say, forty-
five—it may have been sixty—hours in that. Forty-five hours, I think, in a T34. I’ve got
my logbooks. We could check it.

RV: Oh yeah, absolutely.

RM: My earliest logbooks.

RV: And you’ve kept these all these years?

RM: I’ve kept these all these years?
RV: Why did you keep them?

RM: I don’t know. Because I’m a fairly organized person. I keep things that I think might have some meaning and I dispose of things that I know won’t. To this day, when the mail comes, I open the mail, I take care of the business that needs taking care of, I throw away the trash and file away what’s left and so my desk is not cluttered. That’s just who I am. Let’s see.

RV: And I’ll just say you’re leafing through your book now looking for the initial training.

RM: T34. Finished the T34 on November twenty-sixth. This is 1957 and by this time I have thirty hours. I’d finished thirty hours in the T34. So then we go to the T28. The T34, by the way, had a manually closed cockpit and I will never forget one of my earliest mistakes. The old flying suits had a little flap that you could—kind of like a button where you’ve got one button or two buttons, you put it in the first snap or the second snap. Well, for some reason this flap was flapping loose and when I closed the cockpit it sealed all right after I was airborne because it was still hot weather. Which was all right. You could take off when the cockpit opened but when I slammed the canopy, this sleeve was caught in it and it was such that I couldn’t undo it with my left hand so I had to just climb on out and get enough altitude that with my right hand I could open and slide the canopy back and get my sleeve out and slide it shut. That’s the first time that’s ever been told anywhere because it was a very stupid mistake. My instructor never heard about that.

RV: You were by yourself?

RM: I was by myself, yeah. So then the T28 had a very classic idling sound when you taxi. A memorable airplane. The Navy had a T28 with three-bladed propellers. We had a T28-A, which was a two-blade propeller.

RV: What do you mean it had an idling sound? What do you mean?

RM: The taxiing sound, it would kind of chug-chug-chug-chug-chug when you taxi it. Most airplanes have a very classic sound. Of course any pilot can tell you—or any non-pilot can marvel, “How can you tell what airplane that is when you hear it go overhead or when you hear it taxi?” Well, you just do. It had a very classic sound. The T28 was a good airplane. Anyway, the rest of basic was in that. I mean, the rest of
primary was in the T28 and I finished Bartow in March with a hundred and thirty hours total. So that must have been thirty hours in the T34 and a hundred hours in the T28. So then we go to Big Spring, Texas, for T33. At that time they had two avenues you could pursue: single-engine jet and the T33 or the multi-engine propeller which was the B25, which was of course and old World War II bomber that they used to multi-engine pilot training. Well, I went to single-engine. It’s just the way the assignment came out. I don’t remember that I requested it one way or the other. Again, I was too naïve to really plan that far ahead. As I said, I really didn’t plan a lot of important aspects of my life. It just happened and in so doing, it happened pretty well.

RV: But you did say you had this interest, not necessarily being a fighter pilot in a jet but to look toward these larger planes.

RM: Yeah, yeah. So I go to Webb, fly T33s. That’s another six months from May, well, most of six months from May to October. I graduated fourteen October of ’58 and by this time I have a B47 assignment. And of course B47s, there are many of them. One time we had fifteen hundred B47s so that was the jet. If you were going to multi-engine jet, that was your assignment for the most part then. So I did and that was in Columbus, Ohio. Lockbourne Air Force Base, which has since closed. We were there six years, bought our first home there, that is, our first house. We had owned two mobile homes along the way, in college and in pilot training.

RV: Do you mind talking a little bit about the difference between prop and jet airplanes and then the personal transition that you made? How was it for you? Obviously there’s a difference.

RM: Obviously there’s big difference.

RV: Beyond that obvious difference.

RM: In the jet of course everything happens faster. I would say that’s the biggest transition. Still in any airplane, you pull back on the stick, the houses get smaller. You push forward on the stick, the houses get bigger. Flying is flying, but in any jet things happen faster than they do in any prop. Of course you’ve got fewer knobs in a way in a single-engine jet. You don’t have a propeller. A lot of things are procedurally different but other than it happens faster, you land hotter, you fly faster, things happen faster when you’re flying. That’s just the natural step of becoming a jet pilot.
RV: Did you like it?
RM: I liked it.
RV: Did you like it better than the prop planes?
RM: Oh yeah. I still didn’t fancy myself as a jet, red-hot fighter pilot. I fancied myself—I realized that was probably a step to big airplanes. So we got a B47 assignment. I go to B47s and in the interim between pilot training and B47s, by this time as I said I graduated eighteen October of ’58. I went to B47 School in Wichita, Kansas, at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas which is where the post-graduate school for B47 transition. But before the school started I had to go to Survival School. So myself along with a bunch of other guys got a Survival School assignment to Stead Air Force Base in Reno, Nevada or outside of Reno, Nevada, up in the mountains. And so I went to that school and by this time, by the time you take leave and en route and so on, by this time it’s mid-November. So we’re out there and we’re out in the field for practice survival experience and pretty early on it turned out not to be a practice experience. It became a real survival experience.
RV: Really?
RM: Nevada, that part of the country, it’s right on the state line between California and Nevada and those mountain areas there had a very early season blizzard and we were right in the midst of that blizzard. And what was supposed to be a school became pretty quickly a real survival experience for instructors and all. We had eighteen inches of snow, the temperature got down to fifteen below. This is mid-November and I remember clearly, wading across a stream waste-deep with snow everywhere and it’s way below freezing and of course the stream—it’s a fast moving stream so it’s not frozen—but it’s colder than you can’t believe. So we really survived, instructors and all. It was quite an experience. I got back to Stead, the base, and I think there were four of us that had driven out there from Wichita together. Of course we’re young and foolish and so we drive straight through from Reno, Nevada to Wichita, Kansas. Well, by the time I get back I’ve got blisters on my toes so I go to the hospital there and check in and to make a long story short, I end up with some low degree of frostbite, as do several others. Four guys in my Survival class ultimately had severe frostbite to the point of losing toes. Mine was not that severe but for the first several weeks of the B47 School, which was an
academic school, I had a waiver to wear fur-lined bedroom slippers. I couldn’t put shoes on. My toes were very, very painful and it was touch and go for some time whether I would lose some toes from that experience of frostbite or near frostbite.

RV: Would that have disqualified you from flying?
RM: It did the guys who lost toes, yes. By the way, that’s a very painful thing.

Frostbite is a very painful thing. Or near frostbite is a very painful thing.

RV: I can imagine. That’s a very unique experience.
RM: It is.

RV: What did the Air Force say about this episode? I mean this is completely by surprise.
RM: Yeah, it was an early season blizzard.
RV: You guys passed, obviously.

RM: (laughs) Yeah, we passed. We passed. So we go on through B47 School, move to Lockbourne in Columbus, Ohio, sell our mobile home, buy our first home there. And by this time my wife is very pregnant with a second child. We got there in April and our second child, first daughter, was born in May of ’59. That’s daughter Janet. And so I get assigned to an aircrew and fly for six years at Lockbourne Air Force Base as a B47 co-pilot initially. In those days it took quite some time to upgrade. We spent so much time on alert of course, Strategic Air Command. Flying time hours came pretty slow and so I did not upgrade until—again, I have some notes here.

RV: Sure. Now you were part of SAC, then?
RM: I was part of SAC, Strategic Air Command.
RV: Can you talk about the function of SAC and your training preparation for that unique mission?
RM: Yes. That also factors into my Vietnam experience.
RV: Go ahead and look through your papers.
RM: Most B47s were bombers. We flew a model—there were two models of the B47 that were used in electronic counter measures. One was called the Blue Cradle, which was the 376th Bomb Wing at Lockbourne. It had a bomb bay full of fixed jammers that were operated by a crewmember up in the crew compartment. The other model, which is where I was, was flown by the 301st Bomb Wing and we had a separate
pressurized compartment in the belly of the bomb bay. Now this is going to sound familiar when we get to my B66 experience in Vietnam. A separate pressurized compartment—a capsule, it was called—it was in the belly of the B47. Those two electronic counter measures crewmembers, they were called Ravens back then. I guess they still are, I don’t know. They were electronic counter measures. One enlisted man and one officer. We took off the B47. Of course we had a crew of three, a pilot and a copilot in tandem, on behind the other in a bubble canopy and a navigator down in the nose with downward ejection seats. It stretches the imagination to call it an aisle, but a space where they rigged up some slings and the electronic counter, ECM (Electronic Countermeasures) crewmembers took off up front for takeoff. I’ve never fully understood why. If we had a serious emergency and a crash right after takeoff they were to be goners either way. But nevertheless they took off up front and transferred to the back, literally stowed these slings and crawled back a crawlway into this capsule before we got to altitude. Of course both crew compartments were pressurized separately so they were in the back. So our mission was electronic countermeasures and in the big picture, of course obviously we were in the height of the Cold War at that time, we had war plans to go where the bad guys were and our airplanes, the electronic counter measures airplanes would accompany the B47 bombers and other bombers into enemy territory and provide electronic countermeasure support for the strike. Now, ironically, that’s exactly what I did in Vietnam in the B66. Obviously this is years earlier.

RV: So you were trained really to fly into the Soviet Union or wherever needed.

RM: Yes, our war plans were into the Soviet Union. By the way, back in those days they had what they called “Standardization Board,” or “Stand Board.” I figure there are other names for it in different types of outfits but it was the standardization crews and pretty early on I was on a crew that was at Stand Board. In other words, we were supposedly good.

RV: Well you apparently were if you were assigned to it.

RM: The stand board crew what the SAC at that time called a “Select Crew,” and the aircraft commander and the navigator were eligible for spot promotions. But co-pilots were not eligible for spot promotions. So anyway, I was on a select crew. So I got the chance—my aircraft commander of course was an Instructor Pilot, so I got the chance
to do some air refueling pretty early one from the co-pilot seat in the back and then later
on he flew me in the front seat earlier than normal so I got the chance to fly in the aircraft
commander’s seat and learn some air refueling pretty early on.

RV: I’m sure that boded well later for promotion.

RM: Later, yes, it did. I’ll comment later. However, there were still more crews
than there were airplanes and so we spent so much time on alert. I was not officially
upgraded to aircraft commander for nearly five years, in 1963, which was about the
normal then, although I flew a lot in the aircraft commander seat because my boss was an
IP (Instructor Pilot). Incidentally, I had several IPs, several crew changes rotate, but all
of our aircraft commanders has a co-pilot since the very first one, I should say, but all of
my later ones were instructor pilots and so they gave me quite a bit of front seat time and
some air refueling experience even though I was officially below them.

RV: That’s great. Tell me a little bit about SAC’s mission for those listening to
this.

RM: For those listening? Well, “Peace is our profession,” was of course the
slogan of SAC. General LeMay gave birth to it, held reign over it for many, many years
and then later of course became Chief of Staff and still held reign over it. Our mission
was strategic as opposed to tactical. B52s were coming along, were coming into the
inventory and B47s and of course the B58 Supersonic Hustler. There were relatively few
of those. Those were the SAC bombers and the perfect mission of SAC was to never
drop a bomb in anger, which we didn’t in the Cold War. We have since, B52s certainly
have, but not then. Never dropped a nuclear weapon but we were geared to do that. As I
say, our wing was not. We were electronic countermeasures. But B47s in general were.

RV: Were you happy with being ECM versus actually being in one of the
bombing missions?

RM: It was all right.

RV: Was there jealousy between the two?

RM: From a pilot’s point of view, I don’t think it really mattered that much.

RV: Because you’re right there side-by-side basically.

RM: In practice bomb runs, which were done by radar scoring, we didn’t do those
so much but navigators had a requirement to stay proficient in bomb runs and so we did
ECM bomb runs much the same. So from a pilot or co-pilot’s point of view there wasn’t
a whole lot of difference whether you’re flying a bomber or electronic countermeasures
airplane. Late in the experience, by the way, at Lockbourne, as B47s begin to phase out
and B52s came into the inventory; I finally got my chance to upgrade as an aircraft
commander. Our wing was phased out first, the 301st Bomb Wing, and our airplanes
were put into the other wing, the 376th Bomb Wing although they were still ECM capsule
airplanes and that’s where I was as an aircraft commander just the last year or year and a
half I was there. I had my own crew as an official aircraft commander. We went on
frequent reflex, what we called “reflex TDY” (Temporary Duty) to England or to other
places. Our wing went to England, as did many others. There were about five or six
bases in England that received B47s and we stood alert there. A standard profile of that
would be to fly over on a night flight out of, in our case, Columbus, Ohio. We would air
refuel early on from the KC97s. Later on we got some KC135s. We would air refuel out
as we coasted out from Canada out off of Nova Scotia and off the Northeast coast. If
your air refueling was successful of course you go to England. If it wasn’t successful for
whatever reason you would land usually at Goose Bay, Labrador and have a surface
refueling and take off again. Fortunately I never saw Goose Bay, Labrador. I never had
to go in there. So I had many trips. I counted them up one time—seven or eight reflex
tours to England.

RV: What was England like? When you got there, what were your duties?
RM: We would get there. It was an overnight flight as I recall. We’d go on a
Wednesday night, we’d land on a Thursday morning, we’d have crew rest Thursday and
free time and of course adjust to the time lag and so on, have a little target study that
afternoon, maintenance would upload the airplane and get it ready to “cock,” as we called
it. We would go on alert with that airplane the next morning. That would be Friday
morning and we would stay on alert for a week with that airplane. We would have a
week off of R&R (Rest and Relaxation) and travel was provided to some selected sites.
During the course of that time I went to Copenhagen, Denmark on an R&R trip, at which
time by the way, I very bravely bought some living room furniture, Danish modern
furniture which I had shipped home, site unseen to my wife.

RV: That is brave.
RM: And we had that until about three years ago, furniture we kept for some forty
years. In fact we still have the coffee table and the end tables.
RV: So you made a good selection.
RM: I made a good selection. Also on R&R trip to Wiesbaden, Germany, an
R&R trip to Palma Mallorca, and then many trips into London on R&R. Ironically, later
on my daughter Janet married a native Englishman and so we’ve been back to England
many times and one of our early trips we retraced some of those steps and went back to
the base in England where I had reflexed and went into the Officer’s Club in that base
that I had not been in in thirty-five years. It was interesting.
RV: How did you find the British?
RM: Good. Very slow and delicate. I remember we went over it seemed like
about every four or five months. I went over there one time and they were beginning to
build a bus stop on the base. I went back five months later and they were still building
this bus stop on the base.
RV: (laughs) That’s a good example.
RM: These are the same guys, by the way, that build a Rolls Royce engine so
whatever they do; they build it good and build it to last. So I enjoyed my time in
England.
RV: How was it being away from the States for the first time?
RM: It was tough. My wife handled that very well. By the way, our third
daughter was born in October of ’61, fairly early in those years so my wife was a trooper.
She had three young children that she raised and invariably things went bad. There were
snowstorms while we were away, the washing machine broke down while we were away.
Murphy’s Law prevailed but she was great. She did really, really well as an Air Force
wife. We were active in a church. Can I enter some personal inflexions?
RV: Absolutely. In fact, why don’t we take a break for a moment and then we’ll
come back and you can talk about that?
RM: All right.
RV: Okay. Picking up where we left off, before we move forward in time and
talk about the decision to continue in the Air Force, I wanted to go back and revisit some
important things I think we need to look at. One is your observation of the United States
in general as you grew up. But also, I wanted to ask about your family’s spiritual life and
your personal spiritual life and how that developed from a young age or a high school age
and then going forward. And we can talk about that going through this chronologically.
What happened in the beginning?

RM: Well, as far as the U.S. when I was growing up, first of all, those are the
greatest days. You’re too young and most people maybe listening to this are too young,
but the 1950s were the greatest time. Those were great times. I wouldn’t trade anything
for being born when I was and being a teenager and young adult in the 1950s. Those
were good times and today I still enjoy reruns of some of those old TV shows from that
period.

RV: Why was it so special? What was so good about it in your mind?

RM: Well there’s a lot that wasn’t good. As I described earlier, the incident
concerning segregation, racial issues. Well, it wasn’t an issue. It’s just they did their
thing and we did our thing and we did it separately.

RV: The fact that it was no issue was the issue.

RM: That’s right. That’s it. The fact that it was not an issue was the issue. I just
didn’t know any better. My mother went to her grave using the N-word. Not
derogatoritavely, not—I can’t say that word. Not in a derogatory way, that’s just what
she knew. That’s what she called those people with dark skin. And I grew up in that
environment, as did my wife in Florida. Of course, I grew up in North Carolina. But
those were good, relative carefree days of youth when there were no drugs. There was
alcohol. I’ll get into that some later. I began to experiment with it in high school a little
bit and more in college and I’ll get into that more later. But drugs, I mean there were no
such things as drugs or at least not that anybody knew anything about. Almost no
teenage pregnancy. As I mentioned, I was in a high school with about two hundred and
fifty—well, a graduating class of about two fifty. Total high school was probably seven
or eight hundred, I guess. I only knew of by hearing in the locker room, three or four
girls that quote, as we called it then, “put out.” But premarital sex, if it happened at all it
was very, very below the radar. Sexually transmitted disease was a non-issue, drugs were
a non-issue. I don’t think I had a house key. I don’t think we locked our house that I can
recall in my growing up years. I don’t think I carried a key to my home even as a
teenager. Well, I don’t know if I ever had a key to my mother and dad’s home ever. I
guess they didn’t start locking doors until I had left the nest.

RV: That’s very different from times present.

RM: And this is in Asheville, North Carolina, a city of fifty thousand. One high
school, that is one white high school and one black high school, and a couple of private
schools, by the way. But those were good years. Good cars—I had a ’49 Ford that I
wouldn’t take anything for. I had a ’40 Ford. You know, they were just good times. It
was a good time to grow up. Parents didn’t have to worry, for the most part, about
whether their kids were going to survive teenage years. There was respect. Anybody
more than two or three years older than you was “mister” or “miss.” The idea of
teenagers calling adults by their first name was just nonexistent. It was profanity. It was
a great time to be growing up.

RV: Now, being born in ’35, what are your memories of the 1940s? I mean, your
brother was in the war but he was older and you’re a young man, very, very young, but
what about post-war America and what you remember about World War II in the post-
war America?

RM: Well I do remember, even though we were in Ashville, North Carolina, a
relatively small city in the western North Carolina, we did have practice air raids. I
remember vividly air raid sirens and having to turn all the lights off and everything went
dark. We were trained to turn off the lights and it went dark.

RV: Was that scary for you?

RM: Well, by this time…well, let’s see, this is 1942, 3, I’m seven or eight years
old so I think I’m kind of past the point of it being scary. But I just had no grasp of—I’m
still thinking like a seven or eight-year-old kid but I wouldn’t describe it as scary. In fact,
in a certain sense I guess there was some excitement to it. “Oh, we’re having an air
raid!” I remember clearly the atomic bomb. Well, I say, “clearly.” I remember the first
atomic bomb and all the horror stories that generated from it and the belief that—people
early on developed that fear of the atomic bomb. And since then I’ve become a strong
advocate for atomic energy and as you’re going to find much later on, the printed media
and the media in general, I have virtually no respect for. Not individual media. I know
individual people that are in the media. I’m not talking about that but the media as an
industry, I have no respect for it whatsoever because I think they feed the fears of humanity and so on. So it’s because of the media’s treatment of everything atomic and what happened at Three Mile Island and what happened at Chernobyl. It’s because of that that we have an energy crisis today. If the media had not treated those events as they did, nuclear energy would have developed better, I’m convinced. We’d be using more of it, we’d be using less fossil fuel, and the world would be a better place. And I think the media screwed it up. And I’ll say that again, I’m sure.

RV: We’ll talk about that when we get to that time period and I’m sure I’ll ask that question about the Vietnam War and the media’s coverage of the war itself and we can tie that in. What about post-war America? You were aware your brother was in the war.

RM: Yeah. He came home from the war; I still didn’t really know him. He got married shortly after he came home from the war. My brother-in-law, of course they were already married and so I was not around them very much. My brother did drink a lot; a lot.

RV: When he came back?

RM: Well, over the years. I’ve often wondered what his wartime experiences, how that contributed to his drinking. He died when he was sixty-two or three years old, which was well after the war but he had been a very heavy social drinker to the point of it becoming a physical—I don’t know that he was ever a physical alcoholic but he was way into being a social alcoholic. He was grotesquely—was overweight, he smoked like a furnace and I saw that lifestyle in my brother from a distance and I didn’t particularly like it. We had grown up in a Lutheran church, as I said, and to get in to some spiritual views and what has shaped my life, we were faithful in church. I grew up understanding that Jesus was God’s Son, that he died for the sins of the world and I’m a citizen of the world so that must include me. But it was not until I started dating a Baptist girl in high school and attending Sunday evening church with her that I really became a Christian, that I really came to point of understanding that Jesus didn’t die for the sins of the whole world, he died for me personally, and my faith—I don’t like the word “religion”—but my faith, my walk with God became a personal walk with God as opposed to an intellectual
understanding about God. That was step one. There will be another significant step later
on.

RV: That happened in high school?
RM: It happened in high school.
RV: You felt that change?
RM: I felt that change. Then I met my wife, who was Baptist, and I’m nineteen. She’s twenty-three. We’re engaged to be married. We know that we’re going to—we’re both smart enough to know that we want to have a Christian family, that we want to be in a church together. I’m still a member of the Lutheran church. So just before we were married, as a matter of fact, a month before we were married I joined the Baptist church, her church, in Miami, Florida and was baptized by immersion, as Baptists believe. Baptism comes after your belief in Christ, not as a—I had been baptized as an infant, as a child, which in my view gives evidence of my parent’s faith, but it says nothing about my faith. So I joined the Baptist church a month before we were married and we committed to be Baptist and to be growing, church attending Baptists. Now having said that, there was still some alcohol on the scene and late in high school and early in college I had begun to drink quite…not a lot but party as college kids do.

RV: Typical teenager and into college, sure.
RM: Typical college environment. I was in a good fraternity, Sigma Chi. I’m still active in the alumni association of Sigma Chi here in Lubbock. But I drank more than I should. Well, any is more than you should, I think, but nevertheless—
RV: Because, I take it, in the church you joined, the alcohol was prohibited?
RM: No, not the word “prohibited.” It’s certainly discouraged. Baptists, and I think any evangelical Christian, should reach a point where they believe that anything could be a stumbling block to your brother is something you shouldn’t do. And we won’t get into the Biblical position on drinking. I don’t think drinking is a sin except as it becomes a conviction of your own and then it becomes a sin for me. And that happened later on. We’re married, my wife and I go to Air Force parties, we both drink some. Not a lot. I drink more than she does. I was never really drunk. We have liquor at home, we have two or three different kinds of bourbon and we have a liquor cabinet in our home. About 1962 I go on one of my reflex trips that we talked about before in England. I’m on
R&R. I’m in the Officer’s Club in London, a place called the Columbia Club, which was a military-wide Officer’s Club in England, in London. I’m at the Officer’s Club. It was a hotel, too, by the way. There’s rooms there. I’m staying there in the hotel. A bunch of us have been drinking, partying, had too much to drink. About two o’clock in the morning I woke up sick. It was a community, down the hall bathroom as I remember in this place. So I’m this bathroom, flashing my guts. And more vividly than any experience than I’ve ever had before or since, I felt the Lord’s presence. I felt the convicting spirit and God was saying to me, “Dick, I’ve got something different than this for your life. This is not what I want you to be part of.” And I remember that so clearly. So that was the end of that. So we go home, go back to the base, have a week of alert. By the way, I never finished that. We have a week of alert, we get off for a week, we go back on alert for a week, get off alert on Friday—on Thursday I guess it was. I don’t remember the exact day. They download the airplane.

RV: This is over in England?
RM: In England. We sleep over night and mission plan our trip home. We take off the next morning to go home, back to Columbus, Ohio. We have air refueling on the way home and get home. So this trip, I get home and of course I’ve got three very small children. I get the kids to bed and in the proverbial, as I reconstruct it in my mind now. The years may have enhanced the experience but it was somewhat a situation where we got the kids to bed and I said to my wife, “Dear, I’ve got something I need to talk to you about.” And she said—or at least I recall that she said—maybe not quite literally this way but almost this way, she said, “Well, there’s something I want to talk to you about, too.” And ironically, miraculously, God had spoken to her during that time that I was away, not from the same experience of fleshing in the bathroom, had convicted her about her use of alcohol. We’re Christians, we’re going to church, we’re not setting an example that needs to be set. So that night, we went to the liquor cabinet and poured it all down the drain and haven’t touched a drop since. And that was a major turning point in my life, a spiritual turning point.

RV: 1962.
RM: And a physical turning point. Meanwhile, the guy that had been the best man in my wedding—I won’t go into all of that—came from a prominent family, was the
best man in our wedding. He lost a child, a stillborn baby, they later divorced, his
business burned down, he became a heavy drinker, became an alcoholic, became a street
alcoholic, lived on the streets of Atlanta, Georgia as a street alcoholic for eight years.
And in all those years since then I look back and I think, “There, but for the grace of God,
would be me.” I’m the type person that whatever I do, I do with some vigor and when I
was drinking, looking back now, I have no doubts that if God had not spoken to me then
and I had continued, social drinking would have become more and more a part of my life
and it would eventually have destroyed me or my family. My life would not be the same
by any measure. Meanwhile I’m watching the same thing happen to my brother.

RV: Right, I wanted to—
RM: The best man in my wedding and my brother, I watched alcohol destroy
them.
RV: Did you talk to your brother before he died or did you try to share your
experience with him?
RM: I tried to, but I didn’t…no. They were of course in North Carolina, we were
moving around in the Air Force and every time we would go back to my hometown we’d
get invited down by what they felt was an obligation and we felt was to be endured and
we’d go down and visit a while and he and his wife would drink and drink and drink and
by the time we left they were out of it. We got more and more disgusted with it and more
and more praised the Lord that we had turned from that when we did.

RV: Let me ask you one question, and obviously you don’t have to answer this.
How have you or have you related this story and yours and your wife’s belief in this
aspect—I mean, it’s obviously very significant that that happened to you in 1962. Have
you transferred that to your children? Or as they were growing up, did you talk to them
about this experience, how you felt, and did you tell them, “This is what needs to
happen,” or did you allow them to kind of find their way?
RM: Well, as they grew up they didn’t see alcohol in the house. Well, Rick, our
oldest—he was what? Five? Six when this happened? So our children never saw
alcohol in the house. They knew that we didn’t drink, they knew that while we did go to
some Air Force functions where drinking was going on while they were still growing up,
we never drank and they knew we didn’t. But much to my regret, I don’t remember
really sitting down and discussing with them the evils of it. Well, I say, “evils.” I’m not
preaching that drinking is an evil thing.

RV: Potential consequences.

RM: Potential consequences. It’s an evil thing in my life because I know now
that I could not have controlled it and it would have destroyed my life. So I’m sure that
probably all three of my children, at least one or two of them did experiment with some
alcohol in those college years. Thankfully, none of them did much more than
experiment, at least not to my knowledge and I certainly have no evidence that they did.
And none of them since they’ve been adults use alcohol at all, nor have their children as
far as I know. And my grandchildren range in age from twenty to fifteen so I want to
believe that the decision that I made and that my wife made separately and then we made
together has influenced our entire family across the years to simply not preach against it
but simply that life is better without it. As a role model, they saw us without alcohol.

RV: How hard was it in the military and the Air Force especially where drinking
is so prevalent…?

RM: It is.

RV: …to cope with the stresses of the job, especially if you’re in a combat zone
in a war? And this is kind of a climate of fitting in. How difficult was it for you?

RM: It was pretty tough early on from a social aspect. I don’t think I ever
bordered on being a physiological alcoholic but I certainly was across the border of being
a social alcoholic. I couldn’t be in a social setting without it hardly. It took a little grit
there for a while but it didn’t take very long. I think God dealt with me and he worked
with me a lot to the point where pretty quick I got to the point of being disgusted with it
and being disgusted with those who couldn’t control it. So it no longer was a battle.

Smoking, a little bit similar the same way. That’s another story and I don’t have a
spiritual conviction about it in the same sense but I was a smoker, too, right up until
Vietnam and in fact, I did quit smoking in the midst of my Vietnam tour. Not for
spiritual reasons necessarily, but I guess in one sense it was. I just determined that
smoking had control over me. I was not going to allow that. I was just a stubborn
enough guy that I was not going to allow something to control my life and so I quit in the
middle of this combat tour.
RV: I’ve actually never heard that before. That’s very unique. It shows a lot of strength.

RM: It does and it took guts. And I said to myself, “If I can quit now, in the midst of a war, I can quit.” So I did and I did. So I guess we got sidetracked there.

RV: Well, I was asking about your spiritual life and that directly related to it.

RM: It directly related and meantime, we began to more and more faithfully attend church. I was ordained as a deacon at our church there, actually in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, suburban Columbus, Ohio. We became very active in our church and our children grew up knowing nothing else than to be very involved in church and all the things that involved children and youth as they grow up. So they grew up knowing that. My wife has been a preschool teacher since before we were married. Still is, which is upwards of fifty-five years, works with preschool children and is recognized as an expert in the psyche of preschool children and how to lead and teach other adults to work with preschool children. She’s done quite a bit of that over the years. I have taught adults in Sunday school and Bible study classes over the years a lot so our church, our spiritual life is the center of our life, our social life now. It has been for many years. Since retirement from the Air Force our entire social life has been from our core Christian friends. The business that I went into after Air Force, in real estate, was an all-Christian business so everybody that I worked with were Christian people. And by that I mean they were Christian in their conviction but they were also Christian in their lifestyle. So one can almost say I’ve led a very sheltered life since I was early forty-two when I retired from the Air Force. I’ve been in a very sheltered environment and my grandchildren have grown up in that and I’m a little concerned about that. How are they going to do when they get in the real world? But so far they’re all doing really well.

RV: Tell me about the decision to stay in the Air Force after your term was up and your commitment was up?

RM: Let’s go back to Lockbourne Air Force Base. I’m flying B47s; I’m still a co-pilot. My father died rather suddenly of April of 1961. We went of course to emergency leave, went to the funeral in North Carolina. A little bit later I upgraded to aircraft commander. About that time—let me try to put it context.

RV: What happened to your father, if you don’t mind my asking?
RM: He died of asthma. He did not contract asthma until he was an adult, age sixty. Ironically, I contracted asthma at age sixty. Fortunately I take two sprays and two pills now to control my asthma. Unfortunately they didn’t have that forty years ago. So he died and of course I was just twenty-six years old and the time I lost my dad. And meanwhile, my brother and brother-in-law have now been in the family business fifteen years and counting. I had been encouraged by an aircraft commander to apply for a Regular Commission. Of course with ROTC you get a Reserve Commission. So we begin to think in terms of staying in the Air Force. I don’t remember ever sitting down with my wife and the two of us deciding, “Yes, let’s stay,” but a series of events evolved, not the least of which was my father’s death, that made it more and more apparent that there was probably no place for me in the family business. My dad’s gone, my brother and brother-in-law have sixteen plus years in the business and it’s just not going to work for me to try to go back into that. I did of course have my Engineering degree. Meanwhile I did apply for and got a Regular Commission and of course with a Regular Commission you have no specific separation date from the service. You’re just in until you take steps to separate and it looked like I was going to be going to B52s because they were coming in the inventory big-time. B47s were beginning to phase out. But I had a great interest in engineering still. I had an Engineering degree and the Space Program was coming along and so applied for the Air Force Institute of Technology, AFIT. I don’t know if you’re familiar with that but it was a program then and I guess it still is. I’m not sure. For several years the Air Force Institute of Technology had a residence school at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, and they had what they called a Civilian Institution Division where they would select students to go to selected civilian institutions for another degree. Well, I applied for that and low and behold I got it just before I got an assignment to B52s, or would have gotten an assignment to B52s. And that was at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona.

RV: Did you know you were getting the B52s?

RM: Well, it was inevitable. I didn’t have a B52 assignment but the wing was beginning to phase out and it was inevitable that B47 aircraft commanders were going to B52s. I say, “inevitable.” Obviously some didn’t but that would have happened probably. So I got this AFIT assignment and I’m now on Regular Commission. The
AFIT assignment in and of itself commits me to—it’s two years of school plus I think four years after that so now we’re committed, so to speak. So I go off to AFIT at Arizona State and this is now 1964. Vietnam is going.

RV: I’ve got you went there in 1964.

RM: January of ’65. January of ’65 we moved to Tempe, Arizona from Columbus, Ohio. Incidentally, let me back up parenthetically. May I back up here?

RV: Oh, absolutely.

RM: B47s, I was an aircraft commander. We were reflexing as I had described earlier this TDY at several different bases in the United Kingdom, one of which where we were, was Greenham Common. Greenham Common.

RV: Can you spell Greenham?

RM: G-r-e-e-n-h-a-m.

RV: You just helped out your granddaughter (laughs).

RM: Greenham Common Royal Air Force Base, as were several other bases the same way. The U.S. Air Force was a tenant on a Royal Air Force base. As we were beginning to build up B52s and phase out B47s, that plan ended on June 1st, 1964 and I was there. We went off alert the night before, we downloaded our airplanes. We were the last three and I’m the number three ship in a flight of three, which made me the last U.S. Air Force B47 to depart Greenham Common Air Force Base, Greenham Common Base, and that closed out the reflex operation. And that was June 1st, 1964 so I had the distinction of flying the last B47 out of Greenham Common Air Force Base, which I thought was kind of a distinction. And they were closing it up so much so, an interesting side light, that in the briefing before takeoff, we were briefed that if we had a problem after take-off we were to land at one of the other bases in England and they literally were throwing our wooden chocks that go in front of the wheel, they were literally throwing them on a bonfire as we taxied out.

RV: Now, that’s closing a base.

RM: When we took off and cleared tower frequency they shut down the radios and dismantled the radios and dismantled the tower before we were an hour out so that we literally closed down the base. I want to go back a little bit and talk about air refueling.
RV: Sure.
RM: As I said, I got some pretty good opportunities being a co-pilot for select crew with my aircraft commander being an Instructor Pilot. I got some good air refueling experience fairly early on. The early years of course we refueled for KC97s, which was a four-engine piston aircraft. It was the tanker in the early years of air refueling, the SAC standard. It was hard to refuel B47s because we couldn’t fly that slow and they couldn’t fly that fast. And often they would have to go into a gradual descent and we have to have about twenty degrees of flaps down just to keep flying because as I said, they were going as fast as they could and we were going as slow as we could. So I got some pretty good experience there and then we began more and more to refuel from KC135s and I got pretty good at it.

RV: Were you working the boom on some of those?
RM: Oh yes. Well, I guess we need to talk about air refueling in general.
RV: Yes. Go ahead and describe that. I’m really interested in having down how the KC97 functioned. I don’t think people really understand that early version of it.
RM: KC97 of course was a military version of the Boeing Stratocruiser, one of the earliest long, trans-oceanic airplanes. It was a military version of that. Of course with any aero tanker, it has fuel tanks, it carried a JP4 and of course with a reciprocating engine airplane, a propeller tanker like the KC97, they used different fuel. They had gasoline tanks and they had jet fuel tanks that they pumped to receivers. The boom operator of course lays on his stomach, puts his chin on a chin rest and looks out a window that looks aft and down and the boom trails behind the tanker, any kind of tanker, and he controls that boom. It’s got controls on it much like flight controls and he controls it aerodynamically and can maneuver it around within a relative envelope of space up and down and left and right and he can also telescope it in and out within a range of…I don’t remember what the range was but it was in the order of twelve feet, I guess, full out to full in or something like that. And in what we call “stiff boom refueling,” which is what I’m describing now, the receiver pilot, the bomber pilot, with a navigator’s assistance you would rendezvous with electronic techniques of rendezvous and then pull up behind the tanker, stabilize, kill off your rate of closure, kill it off to zero and then stabilized and then ease right on up into an ideal position behind the tanker. The
boom operator holds his boom withdrawn but in the trailing position. You pull in there
and stabilize and then the boom operator extends the boom and it goes into a receptacle
on the nose of the airplane, any receiving airplane. B47 had a door that would open into
the slipstream and as it opened out it formed sort of a pocket funnel for that boom to go
in. So in the stiff boom refueling, the boom operator puts the boom into the receiver
aircraft. The receiver pilot simply maintains the aircraft as steady as he can in that
position. Of course once the boom seats it locks in with some hydraulically operated
toggles and you’re locked together. And after that you’re just flying in close formation
and trying to maintain that envelope as best you can. That’s how stiff boom refueling
works and the reason I elaborate on that is because the B66 that we fly in Vietnam had a
different kind of refueling system, which we’ll talk about later. So I got pretty good at
that even while I was still a co-pilot. I could do pretty well at air refueling. In day
perfect weather it’s pretty much a piece of cake. At night and or in and out of weather,
it’s not a piece of cake. So I got pretty good at that and when I upgraded to aircraft
commander, I remember my very first solo flight—solo meaning fully in charge of the
airplane with not instructor on board—my first solo flight as an aircraft commander was a
reflex redeployment from England with two refuelings, one as we departed England and
one as we arrived off of Canada. And so that was a pretty challenging and interesting
first solo where it was me or we didn’t do it.

RV: That’s a lot of pressure.

RM: Yeah, but I had the confidence and obviously they had confidence in me so I
did that and then air refueling became pretty routine. Fairly routinely we would transfer
thirty-five thousand pounds of fuel in practice missions where we had scheduled and air
refueling. The heaviest—I have taken seventy thousand pounds of fuel in one gulp in a
B47, which is not very much compared to what B52s do but it was a pretty full load.
You’re getting down fairly low when you start and you’re coming out pretty heavy when
you finish, when you take a seventy thousand pound load. So I was pretty good at air
refueling. I was comfortable with it; I could do it with pretty good precision, which later
comes in to play when I get into B66s. So back now, we leave Lockbourne Air Force
Base in December of ’64, move—in a blizzard, I might add. It was snowing and
miserable when we loaded our moving van. We moved to Arizona and it’s beautiful and
it’s sunny and magnificent and we thought we’d died and gone to heaven. We bought
our second home there and I began school at Arizona State University in a very rigorous
Engineering Program. I’m being paid by the Air Force, along with other students, by the
way. I’m not the only one there. I’m being paid by the Air Force to get another degree.
I’m majoring in Aeronautical Engineering. It is very stressful. I’ve got three, by this
time, young children—four, six, and eight, roughly. And studying in that environment,
having been out of school for eight years, seven years, is very stressful and the pressure is
on to do it and do it well and do well. So that was probably two of the most difficult
years in terms of stress on me and the family. Meanwhile, Vietnam is flourishing. It
becomes apparent that I’m going to quote, “Have to go.” I won’t say, “Get to go,” but
I’m a career Air Force pilot, it’s my time. I’m going to go to Vietnam. Sure enough, at
the appropriate time in the sequence of things, I get orders to the 64—wait just a minute,
let me double-check my nomenclature.

RV: Sure, go right ahead.
RM: I get orders to Thailand, actually. 6460th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron,
Tactical Recon Squadron. 6460th. That’s significant because during my tour of duty, the
squadrons merge or phase out and become another squadron with a different name, but
the same operation. I’m going to fly B66s, EB66s. It’s the electronic warfare version of
the B66. The B66 is a two-engine high-wing, eighty thousand pound gross weight class
bomber. It was built as a bomber. Many B66s flew out of Europe and France and bases
in Europe, England and France in Europe and they were nuclear weapons capable,
operating as bombers in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s. In Vietnam they configured some of
them for electronic countermeasures. The B66 has one pilot that interestingly enough sits
off-center. It has a v-windshield as opposed to a flat—a v-windshield like an airliner for
example, as opposed to a flat windshield like a single-engine fighter. There’s only one
pilot but he sits left of center, not on center line and to the right of where a co-pilot would
normally be is all instrumentation and fuel panels, electric panels, and so on. So it was
built to be a one-pilot airplane. The navigator sits behind the pilot and the other crew
member, Bombardier in some versions, or in our case, an Electronic Warfare Officer sits
to the right of the navigator which would be behind the co-pilot of there was one. But
there isn’t one. So it’s a crew of three. Now the early models of the EB66, there was a
B-model and an E-model and these were basically the same except for the equipment that
they carried in terms of electronic countermeasures. These type airplanes had ECM
jammers in the bomb bay that were controlled by the ECM Officer up in the crew
compartment. He controlled all those jammers from the front cockpit. Now later on I
will talk about, they also had an EB66C that had also some jamming equipment but it had
much more reconnaissance, electronic reconnaissance equipment and we had four
Electronic Warfare Officers in that thing. And they indeed took off in their separate
pressurized compartment in the back. Now why they thought B47 crewmembers had to
take off up front and crawl back there, but B56 crewmembers took off back there and of
course they had downward ejection. So if you had a problem on take-off, obviously the
procedure was to try to roll the airplane on its side so that they could eject downward and
the rest of us eject upward. Since there were four Electronic Countermeasure Officers in
the back of the C-model—I’ll refer to that as C-model—there was not one up front so
there were just two guys up front, the pilot and the navigator, and four ECM guys in the
back of the C-model. So our job, our mission there, was not unlike what I describe the
EB47 mission in the Strategic Air Command. We would accompany the strike force into
the target area, provide ECM support, jamming radars, communications, missile guidance
systems, jamming anything they saw that needed jamming. From a pilot’s point of view,
all I was doing was driving those guys to work. I’m a truck driver, my navigator is
helping me get there and we’re driving those guys to work. They—the electronic warfare
guys in the back—they’re doing the mission that we’re there to do, providing electronic
support and jamming for the strike force in the target area. And I’m just a truck driver.

RV: Where in Thailand were you based?

RM: I was based at Tahlki. T-a-h-k-l-i. Well, it’s spelled several different ways
depending on what language map you’re looking at but we spelled it T-a-h-k-l-i, Tahlki,
Royal Thai Air Force Base, RTAFB or Takli ROT and it was much like the English set-
up, that we were an American Air Force unit on a Royal Thai Air Force base. We had
with us on that same base, I believe we had forty-five airplanes and I counted up in
preparing for this, in the course of time I flew thirty-four different tail numbers of the
forty-five or so airplanes that were there.
RV: Was that a problem? Did you want to stay with your airplane that you knew well or were they pretty much generic?

RM: No, no, they’re generic. The old days of having the pilot’s name painted on the airplane, that’s World War II stuff and maybe some Korean stuff. And they did have some pilot’s names painted on some airplanes but that doesn’t mean any one pilot may or may not fly his airplane that day. So, no, the airplanes were generic. I say, “generic.”

The B and E—we later just called it E-model—with a crew of three and the C-model with a crew of six, they were very un-generic from a mission point of view. But from a pilot’s point of view they were pretty much generic.

RV: Do you mind if we back up a little bit?

RM: Sure.

RV: I want to talk about when you got your orders and you’re in Arizona. You’ve finished the school?

RM: I finished the school. Well, I got the orders of course a couple months ahead of time, but I finished the school. Yes, let’s do back up. We had determined, of course, that my family—we loved Arizona. My wife and kids were in school. We determined that they would stay in Arizona during my time overseas, so they did. Part of that assignment, now, involved a “Transition School,” we called it, to enter the B66 and that was at Shaw Air Force Base in Sumter, South Carolina. Basically four months. And so I graduated from Arizona State in December of ’66, had the Christmas holidays fortunately, and reported to Shaw in January of ’67 for a four-month school. Now I’d made reference previously and from a family point of view, my father had passed away some years before, my mother’s health was failing and during that time she had had a major surgery and had a long recuperation, was in a convalescent center.

RV: And she’s still in Ashville?

RM: And she’s in Ashville, North Carolina, and it’s about two hundred miles from Sumter, South Carolina to Ashville.

RV: Yes, approximately.

RM: Four hours, as I recall, before the days of much interstate. And so I ended up having her car and I went back and forth from Sumter, South Carolina, to Ashville, North Carolina, to see my mother practically every weekend during that four months. She was
in a nursing home. Well, it wasn’t a nursing home; it was a convalescent center most of
that time.

RV: Rosalind and the kids are in Arizona.

RM: Rosalind and the kids are in Arizona. My mother of course knew that I was
gearing up to go off to war and this was grim. She had major trouble with that after what
she had gone through with a son and son-in-law in World War II. Couldn’t understand
why I had chosen to make it a career. I didn’t try to make her understand any more than,
“This is the course our life is taking.” So we finished up our school at Shaw, came back
to Tempe for a little on leave, and then deployed to Southeast Asia in May of ’67,

stopping for Jungle Survival School in the Philippines out of Clark Air Force Base in the
Philippines, the survival school that virtually all Southeast Asia crew members go
through to prepare for escape and evasion and survival in a jungle environment.

RV: Can we hold for a second? I want to ask a couple of questions before we get
into what happens with the initial phases of Southeast Asia. What did you understand of
what was going on in Southeast Asia before you went over? Obviously the Gulf of
Tonkin is August ’64 and that’s when the redder heats up but before that, what was your
level of understanding or the guys in your unit, your understanding and Rosalind’s
understanding of America’s involvement in Southeast Asia?

RM: Well, we knew people were getting shot at, people were getting killed. As a
student, like I described in that rigorous school environment, I didn’t watch much TV
news but the TV news back then and that will become a little bit of a factor later on, on
something I’ll touch on, was the war was brought into the living room of America and of
course the media showed it in its worst possible light and I’ll begin now to reflect my
disgust for media. But yeah, it was war and I knew I was going off to war, I knew there
was a good chance I’d be shot at and I may or may not come home. I didn’t think a lot
about it. You know, it’s just what you do when you’re a professional soldier, so to speak.

RV: What did you discuss with your wife and your kids or did you have any kind
of detailed discussion with them? Did you prepare like a will and things like that?

RM: I think we had a will. I’m sure we did in those days. My wife was very, at
that time, pretty well handled all the bookwork anyway. She paid the bills and handled
the checkbook. As I say, I was totally absorbed in an extremely rigorous academic
situation so she ran the family, ran the checkbook, ran everything and she was very, very
capable of being an Air Force wife in the truest sense of the word. But I’m sure in our—I
don’t know that we ever really talked about the reality that I might not come home. I’m
not sure anybody that goes off to war talks that way with their family. We didn’t but
certainly we both knew that.

RV: What did you tell your daughter and two boys?
RM: I don’t remember what I told them but by this time they’re kind of old
enough to see what’s going on and they know Daddy’s going off to Vietnam. We called
it Vietnam. As I say, I was stationed in Thailand but as I’m sure anybody that would be
interested in listening to these words would know, most of the air war—virtually all of
the air war—in North Vietnam was conducted out of Thailand and off the deck of aircraft
carriers. The war in South Vietnam was a little bit of another story. But those of us that
were based in Thailand flew into North Vietnam. Most of the people that flew into North
Vietnam flew out of Thailand or off the deck of aircraft carriers. So when I say, “I was in
Vietnam,” I wasn’t. I was in Thailand.

RV: Of course, of course. And that’s why we broaden it to the Vietnam War, yes,
but service in Southeast Asia because there are so many other countries involved in the
area of operations. Why was the United States in Vietnam, according to what you had
understood at that time?
RM: I didn’t know very much. I’m ashamed to know how little I knew, how little
I stopped to ask. I guess I was naïve, I guess I was…I don’t know what I was, but I guess
I bought into the story that if we didn’t stop them there, we’d be stopping them in San
Francisco and some of those thoughts that were prevalent at the time. I knew enough
about Communism to know it had to be stopped. I knew enough about the freedom of the
South Vietnamese to know that they were being overrun by bad people and that we—the
U.S.—had the responsibility to try to help the South Vietnamese try to contain them, try
to contain Communism as a movement.

RV: Did you see this war evolving as part of the Cold War?
RM: No. I didn’t. The Cold War, to me, speaks nuclear. This war was not
nuclear, far from nuclear, thankfully. So no, it was a war against the ultimate
encroachment of Communism on the world and the protection of freedoms, as we know
them as Americans. But I didn’t think of it in the same…I just didn’t think “nuclear war”
like I had thought for six years in flying B47s.

RV: Right, you were in SAC and so that was your mentality in that sense.
RM: In SAC, by the way, as I said the motto of SAC was “Peace is our
profession.” In SAC, the name of the game is to not go to war. In Southeast Asia, we
were in a war. The name of the game is to go win the war we’re in and I didn’t have an
opinion then. At least, if I did, I didn’t know I did—enough of an opinion to know
whether or not we should have been there. But the fact was, we were there and we had a
job to do and it was my turn to go do my portion of the job.

RV: Did you ever see stopping Communism in spiritual terms? A number of
policy makers in the 1950s, especially Tom Foster Dalton, Eisenhower’s first Secretary
of State, he really saw this as good versus evil. Do you remember having any inclination
toward that interpretation?
RM: I don’t. I do now, in terms of what’s going on in our world, but then,
number one I guess I don’t think I was spiritually mature enough to think in that vein. I
don’t know, but no, I don’t think I thought along those lines at all.

RV: Okay. Let me ask you a couple general questions. What did you think of
Dwight Eisenhower as president?
RM: I thought he was great. I admired him. Not that I was a student of history,
but I admired him as a general. I thought he was great. He presided over some of the
best times in America in the 1950s and his administration gave birth to the interstate
highway system and so much of what’s become good in America took place during his
presidency. I didn’t know enough about politics or study political things enough to really
make an assessment about his presidency at that time. Interestingly enough, I had an old
maid aunt. I say “old maid.” That’s not a nice word anymore but an aunt that was
perennially single who was an Army nurse in World War II, went into Nursing Education
later on and founded and became the dean of the School of Nursing at Mesa College in
Grand Junction, Colorado. We were kind of soul mates. She was a generation older than
me. Younger than my dad but well older than me. She and I were the only one in our
family that left home and stayed gone so we had a certain camaraderie. She was very in
to politics and she was a strong, strong Democrat. Back then I didn’t know the difference
between a Democrat and a Republican and I didn’t care. But she always tried—when
we’d get together she’d try to get me into political discussions. I just wouldn’t discuss it
with her. Of course she’s gone now and now that I know more about such things, I’d
love to argue with her about that. But that’s an aside.

RV: Well that states where you were.
RM: Politically I was very naïve. I was very unaware of a macroscopic view of
things. I was just an old airplane pilot that was sent over there to do a job and I was
going to do my part of the job and hope that the rest of it took care of itself, which it
didn’t. It’s a war we lost and I think the media’s one of the main reasons we lost it,
because of their influence on the American people at home and so on. But I guess that
will come more later.

RV: Tell me about John Kennedy.
RM: Well, he was killed in what? ’63?
RV: November of ’63.
RM: Don’t remember much about his presidency. I do remember vividly of
course the Cuban Crisis. I was a crewmember with B47s during the Cuban Crisis. I
remember that period of history very well. October 1962, Kennedy was president and he
stood eyeball to eyeball with Khrushchev and we won that battle, avoided nuclear war.
And of course we got briefings back then and were aware of things that were happening
during the Cuban Crisis that have only relatively recently been…but stepping back in
time now, I’m very much aware that we were way closer to nuclear World War III,
Armageddon, than most of the world—most of Americans—knew at that time. The
Cuban Crisis was a very hot time. And I guess I kind of admired Kennedy a little bit for
what it took to stand up to that situation. I didn’t know anything about his personal life
and his affairs with Marilyn Monroe, if there were any, and all this stuff. I didn’t know
and didn’t care so I didn’t really have an opinion of him except as president during the
Cuban Crisis.

RV: Lyndon Johnson. You have your orders and he’s the president.
RM: Yeah. I can say a lot about him.
RV: I know you can on the other side but what about ’64 or ’65 when you get
over there?
RM: We knew that he was the guy who was calling the shots in Washington or allowing advisors to make inputs to him and he was the reason, in my mind— I know now and I thought then that he’s the reason we were not winning that war, because they kept us from doing what was necessary to win it. And of course that’s one of the reasons that I so strongly support George Bush now, because he’s the exact other end of the spectrum. He cares less about what people think about his decisions and more about the decisions it’s going to take to win the war. If we’re going to go to war and fight for a cause then let’s win that war. It’s jumping ahead a little bit, but I remember very clearly, very clearly, when we heard that LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson) had announced that he would not be a candidate for re-election. I was airborne that day.

RM: March 31st, 1968.

RM: I was on a mission. You can look it up in the book—I’m out on a mission and when we’d go into North Vietnam, we’d of course go into combat frequency. You’d come back across the Mekong River and begin to head home. You go onto what we call recovery frequency on the radio and the word was being passed. “Have you heard LBJ’s not going to run?” And that was the good news that day as we returned from a combat mission in North Vietnam, that LBJ was not going to run. So no, I was still pretty naïve and ignorant politically but I knew enough to know that they were not letting us win this war.

RV: Everybody was, I take it by your comments, pretty happy about the fact that he was not going to run.

RM: Oh yeah. Yeah, he was the bad guy in the view of most pilots that were stuck—most people that were involved in the middle of the war. He was the guy that was keeping us from winning it because of some other restrictions and guidelines and targets that we couldn’t hit and all that kind of stuff. And of course now we get more and more of that from a certain side of the aisle that doesn’t want to offend certain people and doesn’t want prisoners to get their knuckles skinned and all that stuff. I don’t want to get into that. That’s not what we’re here for. But I didn’t think highly of LBJ at all and as history has unfolded, I’ve thought less and less of him.
RV: The Gulf of Tonkin incident in August ’64. You’re starting your two-year grind there in Tempe. Do you remember these days and the statements that came out of them?

RM: Not very much. As I said, that two years was the most intense two years I think I’ve ever lived because of the pressure I’m under. I’m being paid full pay and allowances to go to school, I’ve got to produce, I’ve got three young children. I was not nearly aware of what was going on in the world as I should have been and I regret that. But, hey, I’m just an old kid from North Carolina. What do I know? I’ve been talked to and now I’m driving airplanes and so what’s going on in the world just wasn’t foremost in my mind.

RV: Okay. As the war really started to explode in 1965, ’66, and then you’re going to be deployed in ’67. It’s the same question. Did you think that the United States was doing the right thing? Did you think that way when you’re actually flying over? Are you thinking, “Okay, here’s why I’m going, this is my mission and this is what this mission is trying to accomplish?”

RM: Yes, I think I did have a real sense of mission, a sense of purpose. I was very aggravated by what was going on at home—the marches, the women’s lib movement, the bra burning and all that. I think history will undoubtedly record the decade of the fifties as being some of our grandest times and the decade of the sixties as being the turning point when America began to fall and America’s been on a downward slide since then in terms of spiritual values, in terms of sense of priority and what’s worth living and fighting for and what’s not and of course the drug scene and the hippies and all that went with that era. I was a student for two years of that and oblivious to it to some degree. While I was over there I was somewhat oblivious to what was happening at home except as it got reported. But I’m convinced that that combination of things that was taking place at home and the media’s coverage of the war and bringing it into the living room and that threw gasoline on the fire of the anti-war movement, which in turn threw gasoline on the fire of revolt and the drug scene. We just found ourselves in an eddy of downward spiral of national purpose and national conscience. The decade of the sixties was a bad decade and the war was part of it. The war fed part of it and the other
things that were happening fed the hatred of the war and that in turn fed the resistance to
the war and all that led to us losing the war.

RV: The civil rights movement is going on.
RM: The civil rights movement is going on.

RV: Martin Luther King killed in ’68, Bobby Kennedy killed in ’68.
RM: I’ve often told my children since they’ve been grown and adults, I’m so
sorry they missed living in the fifties and began to be born and grow in the sixties. They
were children of the sixties and late fifties and they missed the best. They’re one
generation too late. But they’ll cope as generations have before and they are coping and
my grandchildren will cope. But I dread to see the world my great-grandchildren are
going to grow up in. Thankfully I won’t be here to have to endure it.

RV: Tell me about the flight over and how did you actually physically get over
there?
RM: Back then of course we had chartered airplanes. In more recent wars and in
the Gulf War and so on, units deploy as a unit. Back then they did not. Airplanes got
over there well before my day and pilots and crew members rotated back and forth. It
was a given that you would go for a hundred combat missions or one year, whichever
came first. And when we say combat missions, the term counters versus non-counter
came into play. A mission that counted towards your one hundred was one that went into
North Vietnam. A non-counter was a mission that supported some other operation and
did not enter North Vietnam. Early on in my tour they were all counters. Then we began
to chicken out and do some other things and so it became apparent that I was going to
have my year before I had my hundred counters.

RV: Was that disappointing? Did you want to get that stuff taken care of and get
out of there?
RM: Yeah, I wanted to get home, as did everybody. I ended up, by the way, with
a hundred and twenty-one total missions. As I recall, seventy-three were counters—that
is, in North Vietnam—and forty-eight were non-counters for a hundred and twenty-one
total. So they chartered airplanes, “Cattle Cars,” we called them. They were very high-
density seating. Back then the DC8 was the primary jet airliner. They chartered those
from airlines that most of us never heard of and they just ran Cattle Cars worth of not just crewmembers, military people in general.

RV: Did you fly out of San Francisco?
RM: I flew out of Travis Air Force base near San Francisco.
RV: What do you remember about that flight over? What was the mood on the airplane?
RM: I don’t remember. We were all going to war or some shape or form of the war. They were enlisted guys that would be grunt soldiers, they were air crewmembers, they were military of all branches, as I recall, all branches and all ranks. I don’t recall the trip over being with any particular friend. I think I was just one of a hundred and eighty guys on that airplane. We went to Clark. We flew to Clark Air Force base in the Philippines and had Survival School and there I began to meet several of the guys that ultimately would be in my unit. And this of course was just for air crewmembers, the Survival School was.

RV: Do you mind if I ask, how did you say good-bye to your family?
RM: I don’t remember that. I’ve said many times—digress a minute.
RV: Sure.
RM: Barbra Streisand is one of my favorite singers. She’s one of my least favorite people in terms of her political views but her song, *The Way We Were*, is one of my favorite songs. And there’s a verse in there or a line or a couple of lines in that song, “Can it be that it was all so simple then or has time rewritten every line?” Some other lines I can’t remember verbatim but the gist of it is that we remember those things we want to remember and some things are so painful we forget. And that was a lot about Vietnam. A lot about Vietnam I just never regurgitated to my family. I think I told you, or maybe I didn’t tell you, but a few years, about four years ago or five years ago, another of my grandchildren—actually a surrogate granddaughter that’s not blood-related—said she needed to interview a Vietnam Veteran. She came and interviewed me, a very much shorter version than this about the war. She recorded it and my wife was in and out of the room during the course of that interview, not paying direct attention but hearing part of it. And when Jessica, my granddaughter left, my wife said to me, she said, “You know, I
learned more about your experience in Vietnam in the last hour and a half than I have in
the last thirty years.”

RV: Wow.

RM: And this was just like five years ago. So we never talked much about it. We
never reflected much about it. Certainly saying goodbye was a very painful thing but I
don’t remember the details of it. Ironically, I had to do it twice. Or maybe I should say I
had to do it twice. It may come out a little later but about midway through my tour there
was an Alteration Program going on in the B66 to install some more updated and modern
higher-tech, at that time—of course that’s still thirty-five year ago—at the Douglas plant
in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And we had the opportunity on a rotational basis and I drew the
short straw and got the opportunity to bring an airplane home so I flew a B66 home from
Tahkli to Tulsa, Oklahoma. And along with that had about five or six days of leave to go
down to Tempe, Arizona, Phoenix, be with my family and then leave again. So I went
off to war twice and the timing of that was such that I went back when it really got hot. I
got my DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) just two or three missions after I got back from
that. So I had to say goodbye to my family twice. This may be a good time to
parenthetically mention about my oldest daughter, my middle child, Jan—Janet. She was
born in 1959 so when I was over there in ’67 she was eight years old. She’s a very
intelligent girl, very smart, very clever. My wife often had the TV on Huntley and
Brinkley or whoever they were back then while she was fixing supper. We didn’t
know—my wife didn’t realize—of course I didn’t know that my children were seeing the
news and my daughter was perceptive enough to hear about these airplanes being shot
down and how many were lost that day and she began to have some problems—
emotional problems, difficult problems. My wife didn’t tell me about it at the time, at
least early on in this and we haven’t talked much about it since. But she ended up having
to see a psychologist and this psychologist was perceptive enough to determine that Janet
was convinced in her mind that her daddy was not coming back and if he wasn’t dead
already, he was going to be. And as a result of that we were—through the Red Cross
somehow, someway—we were able to work out a way for me to call home and talk to
Janet.

RV: Wow.
RM: And she heard my voice and knew that I was still alive. Of course I don’t remember the conversation obviously. I tried to be upbeat to her and that was kind of the turning point of that crisis. And I didn’t know that was happening until just a day or two before.

RV: How did you find out? Was it a letter?

RM: It came to me—I don’t remember—through the Chaplain or somehow that everything was okay at home, everybody was well but they felt that it was wise that I have the opportunity to call home. And of course back then you didn’t have those opportunities of course like today’s communication. So they set me up—the Red Cross, I think it was—set it up so that I could call home. Of course it was a fourteen-hour time delay or ten hours going the other way. I called at such a time that I could talk to my daughter and so that got her past that. And since then, of course she’s gone on to brilliant things and she’s doing great in life as are all of my children but that affected her. And again, the media brought the war into the living room and an eight-year-old child saw that every day. They were talking about how many airplanes were shot down and she knew her daddy was over there flying those airplanes and in her mind that sunk.

RV: It was only a matter of time.

RM: Yeah. Now, my son, who is eighteen months older—

RV: Rick?

RM: Yeah, Rick. I don’t know if he just didn’t pay any attention to the news or he was out playing ball or whatever and Julie, the younger one, she wasn’t affected, but Jan was of the age and of the level of intelligence and perceptiveness to see the news when it was on night after night after night. Of course in retrospect, obviously, my wife should have turned the news off but we didn’t know that. So anyway, that’s a sidelight there.

RV: Have you and Janet talked about that since then?

RM: Only in fairly recent times. Not a whole lot, not a great deal. She doesn’t. I think she has erased it from her mind. Of course, now, she’s late forties in age. She’s a long-since mature woman and has got grown children practically, but no, we’ve never discussed that very much. None of us have. My wife, Rosalind, never filled me in, in great detail. Although just not too long ago, within the last few months—oh, we just
recently had our fiftieth wedding anniversary just last month and I was saying to her, we
were reflecting about all the good times and the bad times, and I said to her, “What do
you think is one of the worst times in our life?” And out of the blue sky, after all these
years, she said, “That trouble with Jan while you were in Vietnam.” Meaning the
emotional trouble. Now, Jan was not a bad child but emotionally she was dealing with
the fact that her daddy was dead and he wasn’t. And a month ago, two months ago, my
wife called that up as being probably the worst time of our fifty years together and I
wasn’t there to share it with her. I was in Vietnam.

RV: She had to bear that burden on her own.
RM: She wore that alone, yeah.
RV: Since that time, now that you know the significance of your phone call and
that you so significantly helped your daughter, when you found that out, when you
realized that, what did that mean to you? I mean, you indirectly did this.
RM: Well, I don’t know quite how to answer that. Obviously, I did come home.
She was fine by the time I got home, we went on with life, and she became a great
success and went off to college with honors and all that stuff and we lived happily ever
after. I don’t think we rehashed that. And today, as I sit here, I don’t remember—I
don’t know that I ever knew—the extent of that, that my wife was going through with her
and what was going on in her seven or eight-year-old mind. I don’t know and I guess
we’ve all chosen not to reopen that can of worms in the years past.
RV: That’s a very significant story and we’ll leave it at that. Maybe this would be
a good time for us to take a break for today and we’ll pick up next time.
RM: Golly, yeah.
Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I’m continuing my oral history interview with Dick Moser. Today is February twenty-eighth 2006. It’s approximately 2:15pm, Central Standard Time and Dick and I are again in the interview room of the Vietnam Archive and let’s start with Survival School. We left off where you had come into the Philippines and you all were—as all pilots were—sent through this training, or most all pilots. Could you tell me a little about that and what that was like?

Dick Moser: I mentioned the previous Survival School before going to SAC and that became a real survival experience and that of course was a winter experience. We were caught in a blizzard. This was the opposite end of the spectrum. It was jungle survival and unbearably hot and humid and I had lived in Arizona for two years prior to that so I was used to very low humidity and I had major adjustment problems adjusting to the humidity both at Clark and of course in Southeast Asia. But anyway, I don’t recall a whole lot of that. I think, as I do recall, it was something like two days of classroom instruction and something like five days in the field and we were sent out into the jungle. Oh, during the classroom part at the base, at Stead Air Force Base outside of Reno, among other things we practiced some interrogation resistance techniques, practiced pick-up from a helicopter. I’ve never flown in a helicopter. The closest I’ve ever come is dangling from it. We would practice getting on the pick-up device.

RV: The sling? They had a specific name for it.

RM: Yeah, it had a specific name but I forget it. It was a heavy pointed thing that would penetrate the jungle and then essentially fold out so that you could climb on it if
you were partially injured or whatever. You could get your weight on it and it would lift
you. Anyway, we practiced that at the base before going out into the field and then going
into the jungle, as I recall it was a twenty-five or thirty mile truck trip out into the jungle.
And it was virgin jungle where they take us. It was just real, real jungle to be sure. Just
like the jungles of Southeast Asia. Well, of course the Philippines is essentially
Southeast Asia. So it was, as I recall, five days or five days and four nights or some
combination thereof and it was relatively non-eventful. Well, it wasn’t non-eventful but
like you would imagine a survival school to be, we killed what we could find and ate
things we never imagine we would eat. Of course in that short of a period of time you
can eat nothing and be all right for four or five days. But we learned how to trap and how
to prepare at least to the point of it not poisoning or killing you, certain things we might
find in a jungle to eat.

RV: Did you work with the Negrito?
RM: We did. We were exposed to—well, we didn’t work with them so much but
we were exposed to them. My best memory says that some of them came into our camp
and the instructors kind of those who they were and what their habits were and how they
survived and lived on certain things. But we didn’t really interface with them except a
few hours one day as I recall. That’s many, many years ago and very dusty in the
memory. So overall, Survival School was a relatively non-memorable event except for
how you expect survival school to be. Not nearly as memorable as the previous Survival
School and the arctic circumstances.

RV: Did you feel like it prepared for events?
RM: Yes. Of course you always go into a situation like this hoping you never
need anything you learn and thankfully I never did. But I felt like I was prepared to meet
whatever challenges might lie ahead.

RV: And from there did they take you straight into Tahkli?
RM: Yes. Well, from Clark, yes, we flew straight in to—well, I don’t recall. I
think we flew—I was with a group of people going diverse places to fly diverse airplanes
and so on and so I think flew us to Bangkok, as I recall, and I think we probably…I don’t
know if we had a C47 or actually a train or just how we got up to Tahkli. Tahkli was not
terribly far away. It was only a couple hundred miles up, I think, from Bangkok. My
first combat mission, according to my logbook was June 12th, so there wasn’t a whole lot
of lag time in there. Once I had some transitional leave after B66 Transition School and
once I left home, then Survival School and going to Takhli and then flying the first
combat mission all happened pretty much sequentially.

RV: Would you mind describing what your exact mission was and maybe
describe what a typical day was like?

RM: You mean, a mission day or a non-mission day or both?

RV: Mission day and then downtime, non-mission day.

RM: Well, first of all, one of the things that I never fully and completely
comprehended was the whole strike force came in at one time practically, as I’m sure
other studies have shown. We struck North Vietnam quite frequently at seven o’clock
AM local time. The whole strike force would. There’d be gazillions of airplanes in the
air at one time and of course we were provided electronic countermeasure support so we
were jamming anybody and everybody and supporting dozens, scores, sometimes literally
hundreds of airplanes and striking at the same time.

RV: Can you describe the squad? I mean, the whole force, what it looked like.

Were you guys on top, behind?

RM: We orbited at relatively median altitude, which was a little uncomfortable.

Low enough to easily get shot down. We typically orbited in the range of twenty-five to
twenty-seven thousand, which, for a jet aircraft is not a very high altitude. But apparently
the experts determined that that was the optimum altitude for signal strength and the
pulse strength and so on for the effectiveness of the electronic jammers that we were
jamming. So we were relative sitting ducks considering the altitude we were at. We
were neither on the deck nor high, we were right at very median altitude. We frequently
flew as a flight of two and sometimes three B66s and we would support, like I said,
literally many, many airplanes from many bases and carriers as far as the strike is
concerned. But going in for tanker support, we would often go in with or just behind or
just ahead of an F105 flight. Well, I’ll come later to some missions where we went off a
single-ship aircraft. But most of the time we went off in a flight of two or three and
would refuel in that same sequence that went on the refueling missions. The missions
that came in from what we called the “West Side” or the “Back Side,” would go across
Laos and into Hanoi and Hai Phong areas and typically orbit over or just northwest of Hanoi. Those would be generally non-refuelable missions. We would not need to air refuel. The B66 was good for about three hours and ten to three twenty comfortably under combat circumstances. Three and a half hours without air refueling was pushing it so three ten, three fifteen was a pretty typical non-refueled mission length. If we air refueled we would typically do that out on the Gulf of Tonkin with some other exceptions that I’ll come to later, some missions referred to as Tiny Tim missions. But if we were going into the Hai Phong area off the Gulf of Tonkin we would go across south of the seventeenth parallel and refuel out over the Gulf, headed generally north, northwesterly and then orbit in the bend of the Bay there at the Gulf of Tonkin. Yeah, just orbit over the Gulf of Tonkin just off of Hai Phong.

RV: Right. Enough distance to where you could be effective.
RM: Enough distance to be effective and of course we would see the target, see the explosion, see the SAM (Surface-to-air Missiles) missiles being launched. Well, you couldn’t see the missile but you could see the flame of it. But it was pretty close, but off the coast over the Gulf of Tonkin. Most of the missions were very early with some exceptions I’ll come to later. Very early departures, such to beat the time over target for seven o’clock in the morning. So our early briefings would be anywhere from two-thirty to four o’clock am, would be our pre-flight briefings. And then take-off times of course would be staggered. Often we had on our base F105s and a squadron of KC135s and our B66s. So on any given combat day there could be forty, forty-five airplanes taking off and recovering from that same one runway.

RV: And that takes what?
RM: It takes a finite length of time. Of course we take of minimum take-offs and join in formation and that sort of thing. But still, to launch a whole strike force—and their timing of launch would depend on where they were going, where their target was and which side they were going in from, whether they were going to be air refueled or not and that sort of thing. In fact, many times I think we probably launched forty, forty-five airplanes in an hour or so. And then the recovery, I might skip ahead to that. As you might imagine, you go into a target area and everything scatters. The F105s and F4s that are coming up from some other bases, all the airplanes that are delivering the weapons
get scattered, as do the other support aircraft and so when we would come back across the Mekong and regroup on our way back to Tahkli you would attempt to find, to rejoin, a shattered formation and use radio communications once you got back across the Mekong River to where you could communicate and attempt to rejoin. The name of the game was to come in, in at least a formation of two simply from the standpoint of timing. You’ve got to recover a lot of airplanes on one piece of concrete in a short period of time, some of them crying “Minimum fuel, emergency fuel, battle damage” perhaps. And so it became a gaggle. I think that was maybe the birth of the term gaggle as it relates to airplanes instead of geese.

RV: Right. That makes sense.

RM: And we had procedures for dissimilar formations. I don’t remember specific numbers but I’m going to just give for-instances here. B66 I think flew the initial leg. We used the 360 overhead pattern. We flew initially—I’m going to say two hundred and forty knots. The F105 flew initial much hotter. I’m going to say three hundred knots. I don’t know that those numbers are right but the idea is there. If we had a dissimilar formation—and there were times, I won’t say often, several times, probably a dozen or fifteen times out of the hundred and twenty missions that I came in and we made a dissimilar formation. The B66 and F105s would find each other and we’d join up and come in as a formation of three or four or two. And we had a compromised air speed. Again, I don’t remember the number but let’s say it would be 270, which meant the B66s would be coming in hot, and the F105s would be coming in slow on initial leg. But the name of the game was to get as many people in a short interval on the runway as possible. Of course, if you come in formation and break then you can land at thirty, forty-five second intervals and very closely.

RV: What did they tell you all about flying over Laos and the dangers therein and the position of the country? The political position that it’s supposed to be a neutral country but everyone in the theater knew it was not. What did they tell you about Laos?

RM: Oh I don’t remember much specifically but if you went down over Laos you considered that you were down over enemy territory and going to be sought after. In fact, a good friend of mine—not a good friend—actually, I never really knew him. I ended up living next door to his wife and family several years later in the early seventies. After I
had returned, he was over there in F4s and got shot down over Laos. And today, he’s still
listed as MIA (Missing in Action). Of course that was in 1972 so I don’t remember a lot
of intelligence briefings other than you weren’t home until you were back across the
Mekong in Thailand. That’s just the way I thought of it. Back to the time of day, these
very early departures meant that if you were going to have a three am briefing, or even
two-thirty, you went to bed very early. Fortunately, the aircrews at Takhli had air-
conditioned billets. We had—I’ve even forgot what they call them. It may come to me.
I want to say shack but it was something a little more elaborate than that. As I remember,
they were six-bedroom buildings, two men to a room, with a common lounge area or
common living area with some chairs and some games. I have a game today that I still
have that my grandchildren have played with over the years of maneuvering some bars to
try to get a steel ball uphill and then release them at a certain time to drop in a certain
hole and you would score it. After I don’t do it for years, I find it very difficult. My
grandchildren, some of the teenagers have gotten pretty good at it, but I was at a point
where I could bring it all the way up and drop it in the bull’s eye virtually ever time.
That’s how many hours you spend on it. As I mentioned earlier, because of my Christian
experience and my convictions concerning the use of alcohol, when I was not flying or
not working, I just spent a lot of time loafing and sending letters and very primitive in
those days, little—I guess they were what, three or five-inch disk audiotapes, back and
forth to my wife. Very primitive days of tape recorders.

RV: Do you still have those?

RM: No. No, I don’t. We threw them all away a long time ago. I was
Scheduling Officer and I have orders here appointing me to Scheduling Officer for the
squadron and every day when the frag would come in, usually late morning or early
afternoon after the assessment of the strikes of that morning, we would get the frag orders
for the next day and I was one of two Scheduling Officers in our squadron and scheduled
those. Interesting sidelight—

RM: How do you pick that? How do you go through? Is it pretty much
statistical? You know, you have to have this many days off between missions and these
people rotated?
RM: Well, a little bit of all of that. Now might be a good time to come to this air-refueling segment. As I mentioned earlier, my B47 experience and flying with an Instructor Pilot as aircraft commander, I got some good air refueling experience and frankly got pretty good at it. As it would happen, many of the EB66 pilots that were there at the same time I was on a rotational basis, many of them had come out of Military Airlift Command, MAC, and flew transports. They had been trained all their life not to fly close to another airplane. So the whole idea of air refueling was brand new to them. All of those guys never did any air refueling until they went through the B66 Refueling School at Shaw and many of them were pretty marginal at it and learned more with time. But there were about six of us guys that had had come out of B47s and did have air refueling experience and we learned pretty early on, due to some aborts and missed ARs (Air Refuelings)—what we called missed refuelings—that some of these night refuelings, especially some in a mission called Tiny Tim that I’ll refer to later where we had two night refuelings and one mission—those of us that had the B47 experience ended up having to take most of those missions, simply because we were the ones that could get it done better than some of the other guys.

RV: When you say, “take those missions,” you mean you literally went up and flew the tankers to refuel?

RM: Yeah. No, no, no, no. Not the tankers. We took the B66 missions that required night air refueling.

RV: I see, I see.

RM: So that dictated it some. Of course we had some directives to try to keep everybody relatively even relative to when they got there. And of course people are coming in and rotating home all the time so there are some people that are approaching going home and some that are just getting there so we had to blend combat experience with the right number of missions available and also the time of day. For example, if you flew one of these early missions one day, if you took of at five-thirty and landed at eight-thirty and landed at nine-thirty or ten am then you obviously didn’t fly that night and usually not the next day. Seldom we flew two days in a row because we had other additional duties to do. If you were there nearly a year in that cycle—by the way, we worked forty-two days in a row, six weeks of working and then a week of R&R. So you
had seven days off every forty-nine days and in that cycle you end up with...oh I don’t
know. I haven’t stopped to count. What? Three hundred working days maybe in a year?
And I ended up with a hundred and twenty-one missions, which was about right. On
average, about every third day and juggling from night to day and the length of the
missions and all that entered into who was scheduled to do what. Also, I might mention
that pilots in the E-model, which had only pilots, navigators, and Electronic Warfare
Officers—one of each—they were scheduled independently. In other words, I would fly
with some navigator and some EWO today and two days from now I’d fly with a
different navigator and a different EWO.

RV: How was that? Was that difficult?

RM: It was all right. It was all right. We were standardized to the point that that
was not crucial. Now, having said that, going to the C-models, which I described earlier,
the models with had one pilot, one navigator, and four Electronic Warfare Officers in a
separate pressurized capsule, generally speaking the four EWOs flew as a crew and
scheduled as a crew and were made up as a crew. There were obvious exceptions to that
if somebody was DNIF, Duty Not Involving/Including Flying, sick, whatever. They’d
substitute. But generally those guys were scheduled as a crew and scheduled by EWO
Scheduling Officers and Navigator-Scheduling officers scheduled them. I scheduled only
the pilots.

RV: How did you get that position?

RM: I don’t know. Just arbitrary, you know. Or maybe you don’t know, but in
an organization like that or any organization, additional duties are assigned, and
particularly when you’re only in an outfit for a year or so then there’s continuous
turnover. I don’t know of seniority. I guess I came there as a Senior Captain, was
promoted to Major as I recall in November. I got there in June and started wearing my
Major sleeves I believe in November so I was a relatively Senior Captain and that may
have had something to do with it. So there’s additional duties all up and down.
Everything from United Way Officer to the whole ball of wax. So I didn’t ask for it but I
was happy to do it. It was right up my ally, I guess, to be the Scheduling Officer. So
having said all that, I come back to say that all of that work was virtually an everyday job
and if I flew early with a five-thirty am take off, I did that in the afternoon. If I had a
night mission which would take off at ten or eleven o’clock at night, I did that in the afternoon and would go home and rest for a while and go eat or whatever and then go fly with a nighttime take off.

RV: Was there a minimum time that they required you to sleep before flights?

RM: Oh, there was. Their crew rest requirements I don’t remember specifically what they were and sometimes we bent them a little bit. I might add the EB66 itself had a—I’m talking from memory—but I think our models of airplane had a max take off weight of something like sixty-eight thousand pounds and we took off fairly regularly at about seventy-one thousand pounds when we were maxed out. So the rules didn’t mean a whole lot after all in a combat situation. But I don’t remember crew rest guidelines that specifically. There were some, yes, but I don’t remember specifically what they were and the minimum time between flights was one thing and the minimum time between quote, “other duties” was another. In theory, I could not work as Scheduling Officer for three or four hours and then go out and fly immediately. I had to go home and rest for x number of hours or something. So I don’t remember those specific details. I really don’t. I just know that it was a good time in the sense that I found it fulfilling. I found forty-two days working in a row to be tiring. Unusual hours and different hours, transitional hours. Of course the time zones didn’t enter in but it the difference of the take of and active flying times.

RV: Would they get you to fly two or three consecutive day missions versus kind of mixing you up or night?

RM: I think I tried—of course, I had control over that to a large extent as Scheduling Officer—and I think we did. Some guys just simply said they didn’t like flying at night or didn’t like night flights or night formations. Of course you’ve got formation takeoffs. And we tried to cater to some of the weaker—I say, “weaker” and I don’t say that condescendingly, but we tried to match pilot skills and pilot experience with the difficulty of the mission. That is, night formations and especially night refuelings and so on like that. In my log book I started the habit of logging the takeoff times and as I look over here, I had about four in a row that were early morning and then one before that was two in the afternoon and then two after that was 3:15 and 2 o’clock in
the afternoon and then I went back to mornings. So it skipped around. I don’t notice the
day interval between that.

RV: You’re looking in your logbook now. I’m just making a note.
RM: Looking in my logbook, yeah.
RV: Do you mind if I take a look at that?
RM: Sure. That’s starting with my first mission there.
RV: Now which did you prefer, daytime or nighttime?
RM: Well, daytime of course is easier on your body clock and everything, or at
least on my body clock it was, but I rose to the challenge of the night missions. They
were a little more difficult in terms of flying the formation and certainly the air re-
refueling. Some of the Tiny Tim missions that I had referred to earlier were B52 support
missions. Really, they were non-counter missions, most of them were.
RV: Why is that?
RM: Well, because we did not go into those target areas. We were orbiting
further south. And I don’t remember that specifically but what I do remember is that
would support three strikes. We would take off from Takhli, go in and support a strike,
come out and air refuel, go in and support another strike, come out and air refuel a second
time, go support the third strike and go home. So we would go into the target area, which
was generally over Laos or northern South Vietnam because of the Ho Chi Minh trial.
That’s why they were non-counters. So it would involve two refuelings and those
refuelings would be over land and in very short refueling areas where you were not
straight and level very long. More often than not you were refueling in a turn and quite
often you were refueling in some weather. Very frankly, that’s some of the most
difficult, the most demanding pilots skills that I’ve ever been exposed to do.
RV: I can imagine it was very challenging.
RM: As I’ve said earlier, air refueling on a nice clear blue-sky day when there’s
no turbulence and it’s clear and beautiful is a walk in the park. But at night it gets worse,
in a turn it gets worse, in a thunderstorm it gets worse and you take all three of those—
not in a thunderstorm, you don’t fly in a thunderstorm but you fly near enough to them
that lightning is flashing everywhere and the clouds are being illuminated—that was
pretty hairy and there were several of our guys, quite a few of our guys, could not cut it.
So a relative handful of us taking most of those missions. I know that may sound a bit
egotistical but the simple fact of the matter is that those of us that had B47 experience
and air refueling experience could do that a lot better than those who didn’t.

RV: Well, that takes a tremendous skill set to do something like that.

RM: It does and it takes some very heavy mental concentration. Like so many
things, athletics or anything else, it’s as much mental as anything else and when you’re
attempting to get on that boom—and in a second I’ll come to the difference of the air
refueling types—but air refueling is a mental thing. You’ve got to concentrate on the
airplane that you’re flying formation with and you’ve got to deny what your eyes see—
the lightening flashes and the clouds and so on—it’s a mental exercise, very much so.

Some of the hardest refueling I think I ever did in a B47 was against the Northern Lights.
The Aurora Borealis, way up in Canada one time, refueling against the backdrop of the
Aurora. The Aurora is a magnificent thing to see, but you don’t want to air refuel against
the backdrop of it because you get all these lights at various angles and vertigo—it takes
ultimate concentration to deny what you’re seeing of the light angles and to keep from
going vertigo and to focus on the airplane. That’s an aside.

RV: Did you like the challenge of doing this?

RM: I like that challenge, yeah. I was good at air refueling. I never missed
getting my gas, as we say, and that was the challenge of any flying that I’ve ever done
that I enjoyed most, was air refueling, but especially in the B66. Let me touch on now
the difference between the stiff boom in the B47 as we’ve discussed, where the receiver
pilot flies into formation behind and below the tanker, it stabilizes and gets stationary
relative to the tanker. The boom operator then takes the boom home. The receiver
aircraft is the female in that it has this receptacle. The boom operator is the male. He
sticks the boom into this receptacle. With the probe and drogue system, which the B66
used and some Navy fighters used in those days, was quite different. The stiff boom was
still there but it had attached to it a flexible hose, and I forget how long that hose was but
I’m going to say in the order of fifteen feet or so, and at the end of that hose was what we
referred to as a bucket—basically a funnel that was cut with fins such that it was
aerodynamically stable. It would trail in the slipstream of an airplane and be stable. So
the method of refueling that was—and the B66 now had a probe sticking out of the nose
and at the end of that probe was a nozzle. We called it a foreskin, if I may, and the ironic
thing is, the pilot sits on the left side of the B66 and the refueling probe comes out of the
right side of the nose so the pilot only sees the last twelve inches or so of the probe. And
in the probe and drogue system the boom operator is totally passive. He trails the boom
and from the boom is trailing the hose with the bucket at the end of it. It’s the receiver
pilot’s job to aggressively come in and stabilize. Basically the procedure was to come in
and stabilize about six or eight feet, ten feet back, and then gradually come in with a rate
of closure so that you put the probe into the drogue with enough positive velocity for it to
seat and activate the hydraulic latches that would grab it and hold it and that would push
the foreskin back so that the fuel would flow around it.

RV: You had indicators in the cockpit that would tell you when it was ready and
locked.

RM: The cockpit, yeah. You have a light that would tell you contact was made
and of course the boom operator did, too. In a single-pilot airplane you’re not really
watching your cockpit so much at that point. It would depend on the boom operator to
tell you when you’ve got a good seat. And of course you can feel it. You come in with a
positive rate of closure. Not too fast because that’s big trouble. Not so slow that if you
just kind of pick it up but it won’t seat and get the foreskin back so fuel won’t flow. So
you’ve got to hit it with a positive rate of closure and then stop that rate of closure almost
immediately and then you’d take it off to the side a little bit so that this funnel had a
double swivel connection so that the ideal position when you were hooked up, you’d hit
the funnel or the bucket, take it slightly off to the side and take some slack in the hose so
that the hose would make almost a “U,” almost a hundred and eighty degrees and you
were off slightly to the side or somewhat to the side. Probably in the ideal position,
you’d be five or six feet off of the centerline of the tanker. And that’s the way the fuel
would transfer.

RV: How long did this take? I know it probably differs on the type of AR.

RM: Yeah. As I recall, we could take—I’m mixing B47 now—I think B66, we
could take something like two thousand pounds a minute, and routinely we would take
something like twelve thousand pounds fairly routinely. So it would be in the order of
five or six minutes it would take to transfer that fuel. The B47 would transfer at about
thirty-five hundred pounds a minute depending on the fuel tanks you were putting it in. And incidentally, part of the pilot’s responsibility of course was to configure the fuel panels. Since you don’t have a co-pilot you had to configure your fuel panel so that the fuel you took went into the proper tanks that you wanted it to go in to maintain center of gravity balance and so on.

RV: How far away did you say you’re underneath the refueling airplane? How close did you have to come up under it?

RM: Well it depends on what you mean? What part of it? The nose of a receiver aircraft, any kind of aircraft, is probably—and somebody will correct me on this I’m sure—but it’s probably in the order of eight feet below the horizontal stabilizers of the tanker.

RV: Which means?

RM: Which means you’re looking up at the boom operator at about a thirty-degree angle. See, he’s laying on his chest with his chin on a rest looking down at you and as a pilot in the receiver aircraft, you’re looking up in the boom operator’s face. Of course when you pull off to the side you’re looking over here at him. Well, you’re not really looking at him. Once you hook up, you’re flying formation on the airplane. When you’re hooking up, you’re flying formation on that bucket and then once you hit it you move it off to the side gradually and you fly formation on the tanker. I don’t remember what that vertical distance is but obviously the two airplanes are touching each other through the boom and the hose. The rendezvous and initial hookup and be quite difficult. I remember the first time I tried that. My response was, “This can’t be done.” The second time I went in and tried it—and I’m talking back in my B47 days—the second time I went in and tried it, I thought, “This can be done but I’m not sure I can do it.” Then the third time, I backed off and went in again and said, “Well, I think I can do this if you give me enough time to get it down.” And of course pretty soon I got to where I was pretty good. The boom, incidentally, is not so much a factor with the B66 but the boom had stripes on it, had a green zone and then green stripes and then a yellow zone and then yellow strips and then a red zone, in and out, having to do with the telescoping of the thing. So these stripes were in the order of maybe two inches wide and the challenge became on a good day, to take on thirty-five, forty, fifty thousand pounds of fuel and
keep the boom within the width of that stripe. In other words, not let your transitional
distance vary more than two inches and do that while you’re taking on fuel at about
thirty-five hundred pounds a minute and the tanker is getting lighter at thirty-five hundred
pounds a minute plus his fuel consumption. So air refueling can be a very precise art on
a good clear day. It can be tough in night weather.

RV: Tell me the difference between daytime and nighttime flying, just basic
information on that and what you liked, what you preferred.

RM: Gosh, I’m not sure how to answer that.

RV: I mean, besides the obvious, that you could see better most of the time during
the daytime. What’s it like from a pilot’s point of view?

RM: I always enjoyed nighttime flying. In the B47 of course you were quite high,
three-five thousand feet and higher. In good weather you can see for miles. I remember
one time just literally seeing from Boston to Washington and seeing all the megalopolises
of the lights all at one time from slightly aside. You can look over your left shoulder and
there’s Boston and look up ahead on the left and there’s Washington and here’s
Baltimore and here’s Philadelphia and Wilmington and here’s New York City and here’s
Boston behind. The visibility on a good clear night always—and again, from a spiritual
side, you see infinitely more stars at night on a good clear night. Just the grandeur of
God’s creation strikes home to you. In a combat mission in B66 you don’t think along
those lines particularly, but I didn’t mind night. Let’s put it that way. You see a lot of
flashes, you see the flashes of bombs going off, and you see the trail of missiles coming
up. You see a lot more at night from that point of view than you do in the bright daylight,
especially in the B52s. When they would come in and just drop a long trail of bombs it
was just incredible to see the continuous flash for miles, just one after another and they
would drop them in that kind of stream. The name of the game there was not necessarily
to kill so many guys with the bombs but to kill them from lack of sleep. They’d go in
every hour during the time period of nighttime being here. They would strike every hour
along the Ho Chi Minh trail and just simply deny those guys, the bad guys, sleep. If you
didn’t kill them, you wake them up and I don’t think they got a good night’s sleep in
weeks.
RV: Can you tell me a little bit about the combat missions once you got over target and things you remember seeing, things that stand out to you, separate incidents that made an impression?

RM: Well you could see SAM missiles being launched. It’s a very long, slender missile. You could see the fire under it and as it got some altitude. And as I mentioned, we were relatively low. You could actually see the missile. And it was beautiful to see a missile—let me finish this sentence—it was beautiful to see a missile coming up and then to see it go awry. You could tell when your EWOs found its guidance system and jammed it and it would just spin off or self-destruct or whatever. There was a lot of radio chatter, almost none of which would be mine. Most of it would be the strike force communicating with each other. The name of the game for me was just to fly in orbit. As I mentioned earlier, I fancied myself as nothing more than a truck driver to take these EWOs to work so they could go up there and support the strike force with their electronic jamming and I’m just driving them up there and driving them home. So unlike pilots who were dropping bombs and making low-altitude, high-speed approaches on targets, there was very little pilot skill involved from that point of view. I mean, once you’re in the target area, for all practical purposes you’re on autopilot most of the time in the orbit. So pilot skill was taking off and landing and air refueling. The rest of it, you’re just driving the truck.

RV: How did you all get along with the EWOs?

RM: Good, good. I think we had good rapport. I know a lot of the F105 pilots; the EWOs couldn’t buy a drink at the club, they told me, because those guys—the fighter pilots—were buying them drinks because they knew they had saved them. Interesting—I went back to a B66 reunion. There is, by the way, a B66 organization and a website for anybody and everybody that ever flew the B66 in any of its models—bomber configuration, electronic warfare configuration—and we had a reunion. In fact they have a reunion every two years. I’ve only been to one. I only became aware of it a few years back. But about three years ago I went to one and it was mostly EWOs that were there because there were more of them in the first place. There were four per airplane and they were career EWOs that mostly knew each other at other bases and other times, whereas most of the pilots, most B66 pilots—certainly during the Vietnam War—most of them
were only in the airplane for a year. I never flew it or even saw it before I got my
assignment and I when I landed from my last mission I never flew it again. I almost
don’t know that I never saw it again except in a museum. So pilots came and went for a
year but EWOs were much more of a fraternal, long-term group over a period of time.
But I know that when I went back to this reunion, I think there were only about six pilots
at this reunion. Well, that’s not correct. Six from the time that we were in Vietnam. Six
that I knew and we were pretty highly respected and recognized. That’s another thing
that’s very subtle about it. I feel kind of bad about it. Many times as a pilot, I would not
even hardly know the names of the guys in the back. I mean, we’d have a briefing, we’d
go out and fly, I’d fly with one group of four today and another group of four another day
and I just didn’t get to know them at all, whereas they knew the pilot they were flying
with.

RV: Did they request certain pilots, do you think?
RM: I don’t remember that. I’m pretty sure that some did on those Tiny Tims,
requested some of the pilots.
RV: Why is that?
RM: Well, they were better at air refueling and ergo safer at air refueling. But I
don’t remember the specifics of that. I wouldn’t flatter myself to think I got requested.
Well, I don’t know that that’s true. I think several…yeah, probably so. Some.
RV: If you did night missions they knew you could handle the refueling and you
had flown x number of flights?
RM: Yeah.
RV: How tired did you get? Was there sleep deprivation factor in here?
RM: Not so much during the mission itself. Mission durations were not that long.
Even those double refueling missions were only in the order of six and half hours, six to
six and a half hours, so that was not a factor. The biggest factor, I think, was the body
clock, going from day missions to night missions and flying at all hours of the day and
night. There was something going on around the clock. There was a lot going on at
seven am, Hanoi time, and often in the afternoon there’d be another big strike. And then
there were a lot of—in the ECM business, particularly the reconnaissance, the Tiny Tim
business—there were some single-ship airplane flights that were going on pretty much
independent of the rest of the war. And so the difference in hours was sometimes pretty
fatiguing but I don’t remember fatigue being a factor during a mission. It would be in
some of the longer B47 missions. I’ve flown twelve hours in B47s and you can’t get up
and walk around. That’s a long time to sit in one seat with a parachute on and survival
vest and helmet. But three to six hours was less fatiguing. And of course I was forty
years younger then, too.

    RV: Right, that makes a big difference.
    RM: The thought of doing that now, it blows me away.
    RV: (laughs) Tell me about when you guys would take off and you’re heading
out. How quickly does—do you go for half an hour and then you air refuel? And I’m
thinking about how do you all talk in the cabin? Is there some chatter before you have to
get into the mission?
    RM: There’s fairly minimum chatter. Like on an air-refueling mission, we’d
normally refuel out over the Gulf. We’d take off and it was all pilot and navigator pretty
much until we got to the target area and if we were in a flight of two or three, which we
normally were, the lead navigator of course would basically do the navigating and would
affect the rendezvous. Do we need to affect the rendezvous system with a tanker? Do we
need to talk about that?
    RV: Sure. Yes, I’d like to hear about that.
    RM: Okay. You have a tanker at certain coordinates; let’s say out over the Gulf,
at a certain time. Zulu time. Of course everything operated by Zulu time. Take off time
was planned such that you would be there at that time, as was the tanker’s. However, you
would not be the only airplane or flight of two or three airplanes that he would be
servicing. He might service six or eight or ten missions in one of his trips. So timing
was very crucial to meet that tanker. So he would be out there orbiting and we had what
we called “time on tanker.” We would take off and adjust air speed en route as necessary
to be at the right place at the right time. And he would be orbiting and we would pick
up—he emitted some sort of signal—and I don’t remember the nomenclature of it—that
the navigator would pick up and the navigator would track the distance of separation of
the tankers up here orbiting and we’re closing, coming up towards him. And at a certain
closure distance, I forget the number but I’m going to say in the order of seventeen miles,
if the tanker was headed down track he would stay down track. If he was headed up track, with a rapid rate of closure, at seventeen miles he would initiate a hundred and eighty degree turn. And ideally, he would roll out of that turn as such time as when we would get to within, as I recall, in the order of a couple of miles—maybe three miles back. And his orbit speed relative to our approach speed was upwards of a hundred—something in the order of a hundred knot’s closure. So if he rolls out of this turn and I’m two miles behind him and I’m closing at a hundred miles an hour, that’s more than a mile a minute, I’ve got to kill off that speed properly. I’m five hundred feet below him. That was your rendezvous procedure. You would descend to or take up an altitude that’s five hundred feet below his altitude, come in with a good hot rate of closure that was in the order of eighty to a hundred knots. And of course the great technique there, one of the great techniques of air refueling, is to know how to bleed that air speed off and trade the air speed for altitude and to slow down such that—if you slow down too slow it takes you forever to get behind him. If you don’t slow down slow enough, you undershoot him, which can be pretty hazardous, trying to maneuver so that you get back behind him again. So a good air-refueling pilot not only involved being on the boom but it involved the rendezvous. The navigator brought you within seventeen miles and then after that it’s pretty much in the pilot’s lap. Normally you’d get a visual on the tanker, depending on the weather, in his turn, if not before, or if he was already headed down track you could normally see him fifteen miles out.

RV: It almost sounds like a dance between these two planes.

RM: It is to some extent. Of course it’s true with any refueling. Any air refueling happens that way. That is, any air refueling rendezvous happens that way. So again, you come in hot and low and you trade off the air speed for altitude and adjust as necessary and the ideal is to just come right up there and just park behind him. Just a few feet behind him just come to a zero rate of closure, just behind and just below and then after that it becomes a specific move to actually close and hit the basket. And from the time you come into that freeze position until you hit the basket, if you’re doing that right, that should be in the order of thirty seconds to a minute max just to get that last few feet of altitude and last few feet of closure and to judge that closure rate just right.

RV: Were you guys talking with the boom operator as well as the pilot?
RM: We could be, although we practiced communications out refueling. On good
days we would do that. A lot of days in combat—we’d practice it in training and of
course we did quite a bit of it in B47s, we did. But in the Vietnam theater there was
minimum chatter—almost none—between the airplanes because you’ve got to remember
there were a lot of airplanes on the same frequency and the tanker was working with
several flights over a period of time. So that was almost communications-free. Once in a
while you might get just a simple—the only communication might be from the boom
operators that simply say, “Contact made. He’s got a green light and fuel is flowing.”
But you wouldn’t talk to the pilots or the navigators of the tanker. If you talked to
anybody it would be the boom operator in the final stages of closure.

RV: Did you ever have any difficulties with enemy aircraft at all around these air
refuelings?
RM: No. I didn’t. Some of the tankers went where they were not supposed to go.
There are stories about that that I’m not going to relate but I’m sure the annals are full of
them. They went farther north to pick up a battle-damaged F105 or something that was
running low and they’d go up there and get him so to speak and tow him home. There
are stories like that. But you have to talk to tanker pilots about that. And of course
obviously that is—there were a lot of rules broken in a war. So no, our refueling was
never—the refueling itself never took place in a combat-dangerous environment.

RM: Can you talk about doing your orbit and doing the mission, the EWOs are
doing their mission, and what are you seeing? I mean, I know it varies, obviously, but
daytime, are you seeing explosions or smoke?
RM: Yeah, you’re seeing explosions and smoke.
RV: And planes coming at you?
RM: Most of the strike force of course is going down low, going in low, so you
can see their exhaust trail some, you can see them climbing out after the strike, you see
explosions. At night of course you see more of the explosions and more triple-A gunfire
and more SAM missiles being launched. Some at a distance, some that are at a
disturbingly close distance.
RV: Did you all have any close encounters with enemy fire?
RM: Not really. Well, my DFC. I got a Distinguished Flying Cross, which I
guess most people do. They try to give you one, I think, during the tour. This was
supporting some B52s and we had some SAM missiles coming up and we stayed on
station longer than we might have and our guys shoot them off. I have never had a close
call in the sense of seeing one whiz by, no, but I’ve seen several in the air, not necessarily
coming after me. They may have been coming after me. They were coming after
somebody. But they were coming up at the strike for us, at us. So no, I never had what
you would call a close call in flight. I think I may have mentioned to you last time after
we had finished recording, the closest call I had in the whole thing was one time when
my seat, the pilot’s seat—this was in the old days. It was not electrically moved but it
would slide on a track forward and aft and there was a little pin that would go down into
various holes in this track and when you adjust the seat you pull the pin up and slide the
seat where you wanted it, depending on the length of your legs and your arms and what
was comfortable for you and then you’d seat that pin in the appropriate hole that had it
right for you. Well, these pins got kind of worn and this time didn’t seat all that good and
I may have been negligent—I apparently was—in seeing that it was securely set and
rocking my seat to make sure that it was locked. So on take-off with full power, about
ninety knots or something—beyond abort speed—my seat slid full aft, just the
acceleration, forces of acceleration. Well, just at rotation, as you rotate the seat slid full
aft. And so I’m straining at my shoulder harness to hold the yoke. By the way, the B66
had a yoke as opposed to a stick. Of course trim is rapidly changing as you’re gaining air
speed and the gear’s coming up. No, wait a minute; I couldn’t get the gear up because I
couldn’t let go. So anyway, I finally held it in this strained position until I got several
hundred feet of altitude where I could let go with this hand and reseat the seat and slide
the seat forward to where I could get full control of my legs and both hands on the wheel.
And if I had lost an engine at that point, that would have been it because I had effectively
no use of the rudders. I couldn’t reach the rudders. And fortunately the airplane flew
smoothly until I could get it under control.

RV: What did your co-pilot say or think of what was going on?
RM: I didn’t have a co-pilot but my navigator saw it.
RV: Oh, your navigator did?
RM: Yeah. And of course he was kind of puckered, I guess. He’s behind me and when he saw that I got my seat moved back up, he said, “We don’t want that to happen again, do we?” or something like that. So it was very difficult to control the airplane. That whole episode probably only lasted thirty seconds but it seemed like forever. It was a very near miss and of course it would have been classified as an accident because it was not a combat situation except for taking off.

RV: When I asked you about close encounters with some of the enemy, did you ever see any of our planes shot down?

RM: No, I never did. I never did. I heard some. I heard the others who saw it and I don’t remember the verbiage but words to the effect of, “Somebody got Joe,” and later at the debriefing of course we’d find out that we lost one that day, or two, or whatever it was. So I heard accounts of it on the radio but I never saw it.

RV: I wanted to ask you a couple questions about the base, about being back at Takhli. What was it like living there? You described the quarters a little bit but tell me about base life?

RM: I don’t remember a whole lot (laughs) but it was a relatively nice base. It was a Royal Thai Air Force base. We were of course tenants there during the war. There were a lot of airplanes based there as I mentioned—a lot of fighter pilots, some tanker crews, and of course some B66 people.

RV: How much did you interact with all these different folks?

RM: Not very much. Not very much. I say I didn’t. I don’t think it was because we were—the main reason I didn’t is because of the social aspect. I was a non-drinker and I didn’t go to the Officer’s Club except to eat and I just was not a party animal like a lot of fighter pilots are.

RV: Were there others like yourself?

RM: There were some, yeah, sure. As I recall we ate virtually all meals at the Officer’s Club. That was the dining hall for crewmembers and it was air conditioned, as were my quarters, as was our office. Otherwise it was unbearable hot and humid over there, of course, and I did adjust to that over time. Well, I say adjust. It was less difficult to live in that humidity condition as time went on.

RV: How about entertainment? What did you do?
RM: We did catch a Bob Hope show that year.

RV: Tell me about that.

RM: A few days before Christmas, pretty much like you see in all the pictures, it was just a mob of guys gathered around. I don’t remember exactly where it was. It wasn’t out on the flight line. I don’t remember where it was but it was an outdoor setting and I was able to be there. I had flown a mission that morning and I think it was a daytime show, as I recall. Late afternoon or sometime in the afternoon and I had flown that morning. Of course it was great but I don’t remember much specifics about it. It was during the Christmas time. It wasn’t Christmas day but it was Christmas time.

RV: Did it boost morale, do you think?

RM: Yeah, oh yeah. Of course. Yeah, it really did. There was a base chapel. Throughout our Air Force career we’ve always been a part of a local church in the community and never really attended base chapel but of course I did there because that was all that was available. So the sleeping quarters and the office where we scheduled and worked out of and the squadron building where of course your equipment was and your parachutes and your briefing room and all that stuff was all in one complex. So I was either in that complex or the quarters or the Officer’s Club eating. And the rest of the time it was so hot and humid, I didn’t do much outside. I was not into any athletics or anything like that. I didn’t play softball or anything of that nature.

RV: How much communication back with home? How did you do that?

RM: A lot.

RV: You had the tapes.

RM: Yeah. And my children of course were young, as we talked about, so we had the tapes and letters. I wrote to my wife almost every day and she wrote to me almost every day. And interspersed with some of those tapes that were, oh I don’t know, probably every two weeks we would generate a tape back and forth or so, depending on R&R schedule and so on.

RV: It must have been nice to hear her voice and the kids’ voices.

RM: It really was. It really was. I don’t know to what extent—I don’t remember what we talked about in those tapes. I’m sure I didn’t tell much about the combat
experience, mostly just what I was doing and some of the guys that I lived with and that sort of thing.

RV: How about friends? Who did you meet and whom did you become close with?

RM: Well, my roommate for most of that time—our tours didn’t exactly overlap—but for most of the time was a guy named Campbell. Soupy, we called him. Soupy was his nickname. It wasn’t a call sign, it was just a nickname. Soupy Campbell.

RV: Why was he called Soupy?

RM: I don’t know. I don’t know. Campbell’s soup, I guess, you know, the name Campbell.

RV: Yeah, that’s what I was thinking.

RM: And then there was a guy who was built like and looked a lot like Buddha and his name was Mackanich. And so his name was Buddha Mackanich. His name was Art, I think, but everybody called him Buddha. That was his nickname. We had some things in common and spent some time together. These are all pilots, by the way. All the guys in our quarters were pilots. I don’t know why that was so necessarily, but all the pilots were in one hooch. That was the name I was trying to think of, the name of the ten or twelve man building. There were all pilots in there.

RV: How about the ground crews? Did you associate with them?

RM: Not really, no. I didn’t discriminate, it was just they went their way and we went ours. Of course, the Crew Chiefs, we’d get to know them and the pilot is the one that does the walk around inspection before the flight and you got to know some of the Crew Chiefs. When I did ferry an airplane home, I referred to earlier halfway through that tour, ferried that airplane back to Tulsa, I had a navigator and a Crew Chief with me. And that Crew Chief, that was his first and only time to fly in a B66. So they had to check him out on the parachute and everything before they sent him home. So he rode in the EWO seat during that ferry flight home. Of course I got to know him well during those four days we were together. But there’s really very little interface. I look back on those days and I really don’t have—didn’t make any—lasting friendships. I’m not sure why. I’ve always been sort of a people person. But just the years—it’s been so many years that I just haven’t—I guess I made better friendships during that time than I
remembered later on looking back at it. But it’s not like I went out and got drunk with a
bunch of guys on our R&R or even during a day off. Of course you could go off base
and go into the little town of Tahkli. You can only buy so many little trinkets and junk
that ends up being thrown away.

RV: Tell me about the Thai people. What was your impression?

RM: Very nice. I’ll never forget one of the most lasting things about them that
I’m sure others have cited is their ability to squat for hours at a time. We had Thai maids
that cleaned our quarters and did our laundry—underwear and flying suits. Of course
that’s all you had, was underwear and flying suits. They would sit out on the concrete
sidewalks around the hooch and do the laundry in tubs and they could squat down for
hours and it just amazed me. Of course all Orientals do that. Anybody that’s been to the
Far East can see that characteristic in Oriental people. But their ability to squat for so
long, get in that squat position and work in that position blew me away. I learned and
picked up a few phrases of Thai that have found their way all the way down to my
grandchildren, words that I still use and they’ve become part of our family’s vocabulary.

RV: Such as?


RV: L-a-o?

RM: I presume so. I don’t know. I never saw it in writing. But do this day, I
hear my children and my grandchildren and I find myself using that term often, “Lao,
lao.” I’ll think of some others in a minute that have just become part of our vocabulary.

RV: That’s a neat trinket to bring home.

RM: Yeah, yeah.

RV: Do you think the Thai people were aware of the scope of what was
happening with the whole Vietnam conflict?

RM: I don’t know. I didn’t know enough language to really converse with any of
them. The only real interface I had was with—and that wasn’t really an interface with
them—with the maids. The same maid every day would be around. Two or three maids
would be around there and we’d speak to them and pick up some words from them. But I
never discussed the war and never had a sense of their involvement. I know they enjoyed
our money when we’d go into town and buy or spend money for whatever things. Gee,
I’d spend money when I’d go into town. The Thai’s enjoyed having that, I’m sure.

RV: As you got closer to your departure date and you said you went back home
and had to come back, how did you feel as you’re getting shorter and shorter? And
really, what kinds of missions were designed and what did you schedule yourself for?

RM: Oh, I don’t know that anything changed. I’m looking through my logbook
as we speak and I came home—my last mission was May first and by that time, by the
way, was flying mostly non-counters because of the nature of what was going on over
there. In fact, my last counter mission, number seventy-three, was on the tenth of April,
so the last twenty days I was there I did not fly another counter after that side. It was
mostly what I call “West Side.” Rot Package One, RP 1, was on the west side, non-air
refueled for those latter missions. Yeah, all but two of the latter ones. So I don’t know
that it scaled down much. I had received my subsequent assignment of course, by this
time, and was getting interested in that and communicating. Our letters and tapes to my
family had to do with what was coming next.

RV: What was coming next for you?

RM: Well, backtracking a little bit, I had got to AFIT, Air Force Institute for
Technology, at Arizona State, had gotten a degree in Aeronautical Engineering, and so
my follow-on assignment from that after Southeast Asia was to NASA. I might go into it
a little bit here. At that time, the Air Force was developing a manned space program.
The military manned space program, separate from NASA’s. It was called Man Orbital
Laboratory, MOL. Of course much of it was classified and so on but basically it had to
do with reconnaissance capabilities. And so about two hundred, at least during my time
period—I’ve heard the number two hundred—in the window of time where I was there
were about two hundred Air Force Officers that were “loaned” to NASA, some at
Marshall Spacecraft Center in Huntsville, Alabama, where the boosters where being built
and assembled, some at Cape Kennedy for the launch procedures, and some at the
Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, which is where I went. And I was assigned to the
astronaut office and specifically when I got there, I was assigned to what was called a
Flight Crew Support Team—a team of four people that worked in support of the specific
astronaut crew, in my case, Apollo 10. Apollo 10 was the last mission before the first
moon landing of Apollo 11. And the mission of Apollo 10 was the last dress rehearsal for the moon landing. Our mission went to the moon, the lunar module separated from the command module, went down and made a fifty thousand foot low approach to lunar surface—in other words, did everything but land—then came back up, rejoined the command module and re-rendezvoused, came back to earth and re-entered. That was Tom Stafford, John Young, and Eugene Cernon was the crew for that. John Young was the command module pilot and was subsequently of course a Mission Commander for a later mission. And my title was Command Module Crew Station Engineer. So I interfaced very heavily and daily with John Young, the astronaut, dealing with the crew station of the command module. I spent a lot of time at the North American Rockwell factory down in California when it was being manufactured. Various stages of testing were involved in the testing phases there, and then when it was shipped to Cape Kennedy I was at the Cape a lot, and certainly the last month or so prior to the launch I was at Cape Kennedy. And I was involved in all the crew training exercise in the command module, getting in and getting out and the storage location of all the equipment—the cameras and the clothes and the food—what was stored where and whether a storage locker door would swing left to right or right to left to open, developing procedures for installing and un-installing the docking probe, which was mounted in what was also the tunnel between the spacecraft. So those were the things that I got involved with and it was as a result of my degree in Aeronautical Engineering and Space Technology.

RV: How did you like that?
RM: (laughs) Good and bad. It was good in that it was a thrilling time to be part of NASA, to be rubbing shoulders with the astronauts. We lived in the neighborhood right across from NASA, just next door to and across the street from and around the block from all the astronauts that went to the moon in that generation. My children played with their children, my children got spend some time in the mock-ups and training devices on the weekends and so on and laid on the couches of the training mock-ups and so it was a real thrilling time to be part of that. The downside was that after having been in Southeast Asia for a year and for three months of training in Shaw prior to that, I had been away from home most of the time for fifteen or sixteen months and I got to NASA and no sooner got there than began to travel a lot to North American Rockwell in
California and to the Cape a little later on. So I was traveling a lot. Also, the downside was that I was working for civilians and from a career point of view that had some significant impact.

RV: Such as?

RM: Well, my career was moving along well. I was promoted to Major on time. Not early, but on time. I came home and went to NASA and working for civilians, having my Officer Effectiveness Report—OER—written by a civilian, it was not as good as it needed to be for two of them, two years, and that began to be the difficulty that kept me from ultimately be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and basically ended my career of twenty years as a Major. I never got promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. And I can’t blame that individual necessarily. It was just the system. It was well known that when military people work for civilians they didn’t quite understand the system and the tendency was for your OERs to not be as good as they might be if you were working for somebody else. So from that point of view, it was a good experience. We had a beautiful home there in Houston; we were part of a church that we really loved. It was a good two years in our life. I might add, by the way, that we went there because we were earmarked for this MOL program. The Air Force was loaning people to NASA to get some space experience, both in boosters and flight control and crew operations and so I was part of that two hundred or so people. Well, we no sooner got there—I don’t remember the exact timing of it—but just about the time of the first lunar landing which was basically a year into my two-year assignment, the MOL program was cancelled. Publicly it was cancelled for budgetary reasons. I’m convinced that one of the major reasons for canceling the program was the development and sophistication of unmanned satellites to do reconnaissance as well or better than manned platforms could do. So for whatever reason, the MOL program was cancelled and those of us that had been loaned to NASA were eventually fed back into the Air Force mainstream, which in my case was to go to headquarters SAC back into the command where I’d grown up at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska. So I was at NASA for two years and went to Offutt for three years and again found myself in some highly classified—what’s called Code-word Classifications—above Top Secret, some work in future systems reconnaissance branch.

RV: What does that mean?
RM: Well, just what the name implies—dealing with future reconnaissance systems.

RV: Can you describe what you were working on?

RM: Well, of course it was highly classified at the time, a lot of it was, but it had to do with developing electronic reconnaissance. Somehow, once you get into ECM, you’re kind of into it, into a follow-on airplane, different versions of the DC10, which was the new commercial airliner. We were looking for military adaptations of that for command control and electronic countermeasures platforms. Of course there at Offutt, there were based and still are based some highly classified reconnaissance platforms. The KC135 or C135 airframes, we were doing some future systems work regarding follow-ons for that. Also, some satellite work. I had several trips to various aerospace technology people in the Boston area and in California. I was involved in the SR71 and the U2. I wasn’t involved with them except to be very much aware of what they were doing and what platforms might follow them, both in terms of satellite and air breathing machines. So it was all pretty highly classified stuff at the time having to do with future systems with which to do reconnaissance, electronic and visual and all kinds of reconnaissance. That was a three-year assignment at SAC headquarters. Very frankly, I found that somewhat less than totally satisfying. It was a good time. We enjoyed living in Omaha, which surprised us. We didn’t think we would but we did. But from a work point of view, again, my OERs were good but not superior so the bottom line was, I ended up getting passed over for Lieutenant Colonel and then at the sixteen-year point, it was time to be reassigned and because I had a degree that had the name Engineering on it, the great white computer in the sky thought that I should go to Civil Engineering, which is the branch of the military that has to do with the maintenance and operations and construction of the physical facilities on a base. So I got an assignment to Cannon Air Force Base in Clovis, New Mexico in Civil Engineering, which was a non-flying assignment, as was my headquarters SAC assignment, although I did fly C131s, two-engine reciprocating transport planes, just minimum for flying time, primarily as a shuttle. We operated a shuttle from Omaha to Andrews Air Force Base in Washington and I flew that round trip once a month, at least, and some other shuttle runs that we did to some Army missile posts to deliver classified materials to them. So minimum flying
for four to six hours a month type flying there. And then when I went to Cannon Air
Force Base and Civil Engineering, I found that even less satisfying and it was obvious
that my career was beginning to wind down. So I was passed over for the second time
and it was obvious then that I was going to be retiring at the twenty-year point. So I did
the best I could with a desk job there that was considerably less than satisfying. So in my
own mind, the first half of my career was really great and enjoyable, if you call being in
combat in Vietnam enjoyable. But from then on—well, and NASA was enjoyable except
for the travel aspect. But then from that point on it was a little less than totally satisfying
and so obviously I retired at the twenty year point. I was forty-two years old and went
into the real estate business and I retired from Cannon in Clovis, New Mexico. I still had
two daughters in high school, a son in college. We stayed there for three more years and
I got off to a good, successful start in real estate business there while my two daughters
were finishing high school and coincidental with the last daughter finishing high school,
which basically unlocked us from the obligation to stay in Clovis, I had opportunity to
move to Lubbock and associate with a real estate firm here and moved here and have had
a very successful twenty year real estate experience there until December thirty-first of
2000. I’ve been retired since that time, over five years now, doing pastoral ministry in
the hospitals on a volunteer basis. So that brings us to the current time.

RV: Yes it does. Let’s do some reflecting on the Vietnam War. What are the
lessons for yourself from Vietnam? What did you learn most about yourself?

RM: I learned that I wasn’t a super man or a super hero but that I was up to the
job that was asked of me, which later had implications I think even in my real estate
career. I went to a lot of superstar retreats and so on about all the dreams of being a
superstar and I learned pretty quick that I was not superstar material but that I was quite
capable of doing well, making a good living. I learned about priorities pretty early on.
Again, this has shades of a spiritual reference but I think over my lifetime I’ve set my
priorities pretty well and that’s kept me from being like the Olympic athlete that
absolutely sells their lives to the challenge of their sport. I didn’t sell my life to the Air
Force but I did a good job when I was asked to do it. But not superior enough. I knew
that I would never be a Colonel or a General and that was all right. I was comfortable
with that.
RV: Anything you would change about your time in Vietnam?

RM: Not very much. About my time in Vietnam…

RV: Oh Thailand, to be more specific.

RM: Well, Thailand, to be specific. I don’t know. I don’t think so. Again, I flew the normal number of missions for that time I was there, I flew them well, I never missed an air refueling, I got the air medals with eleven clusters, I got a DFC. I did the normal thing that a non-hero sort of a guy does in a combat tour as a pilot. I wasn’t a wimp, I did a lot of things well, but I didn’t do anything sensational. And that’s kind of the story of my life, I think. I’m nobody’s hero in any realm but I do a lot of things pretty well and I found life very satisfying. Looking back, I wouldn’t change many things about any part of my life, really.

RV: That’s a good thing.

RM: Yeah.

RV: Tell me about lessons for the United States from the Vietnam War and I want to invite you to talk about things like the media’s influence, anti-war movement’s influence, and kind of where the country has come since then.

RM: Well, I’m very disenchanted with the media, as I’ve already expressed. I saw the media tell a difference story or less than complete story than I heard in the daily briefings. I saw the media’s effect on our country by bringing the war and invariably, the negative aspects of the war, and of course we’re seeing the very same thing now in the Iraq War. That’s the media’s propensity is to focus on the negative, to pick on anything good and find something bad about it, and so I have no respect for the media as a profession. I’ve never known any individuals of the media personally, so I don’t despise anybody personally. But the attitude, the nature of—as evidenced by the recent incident with the Vice-President’s hunting accident—the media’s propensity to find the very worst and try to make it even worse, I saw that in Vietnam and I’ve watched it fester ever since. And my appreciation of the media as a whole, as a profession that has a desire to stimulate and aggravate the public under the pretense of informing the public has really bugged me and I really learned to—I think the Vietnam War, if we could have won it, number one, politicians didn’t let us win it. But one reason I think the politicians didn’t let us win it is because the media stirred up the people to the point that the politicians
were affected by the media’s story line, as they still are and always have been and I guess
always will be as the media gets more and more sophisticated and more and more
immediate. They will bring the worst. They always report how many were killed in Iraq
today but they never report how many new schools were opened today and the
reconstruction and that’s the nature of the media.

RV: What about the anti-war movement?
RM: Well, they festered that. They were gasoline on the fire of that movement.
And I’m not sure which was the chicken and which was the egg. I don’t think there
would have been an anti-war movement. There wasn’t an anti-war movement in World
War II. Why not? Because the media didn’t report it and certainly before television they
didn’t bring it into the living room and they didn’t show people dying and didn’t show
tallies of how many airplanes were shot down and how many people died that day. And
so the anti-war movement was festered and aggravated and fed by the media. And so as I
expressed earlier, I see the decade of the sixties as the downward turning point in our
country. And very frankly, I fear for our country in the years ahead. Not because of our
military’s not capable of protecting us but because we are morally degenerating from
within, we’ve become a people of self. Self-denial, as in World War II, is hard to find
now, except those few that are in uniform. But everybody else lives in a world of
entitlements and “I want what’s best for me and never mind what’s best for the rest of the
country.” And I think the media has fed and festered that.

RV: What about lessons the United States learned or didn’t learn from the war in
Vietnam?
RM: Well, I had hoped and thought that we had learned not to go into a war
without intending to win it and I think that’s the way President Bush, whom I strongly
support, went into Iraq with the intention of winning. But we’ve got some people of one
of our major parties that have watered that down. We’ve got entertainers such as Harry
Belafonte and people like that that have done everything that they can and in my mind
should be punished as traitors, giving aid and help to the enemy.

RV: Do you think that they have the right to speak out about this?
RM: Having a right, yeah. But they’ve confused rights with responsibilities.

Rights and responsibilities are two different things. You have a right to say anything you
want to but you don’t have a right to yell “Fire!” in a crowded theater. You have a right
to speak your mind but there’s a time and place and a forum in which to speak it. And
the time is not in the midst of a war, the place is not on foreign soil, and the audience is
not to people who would be our allies if they were not fed that kind of information. So I
don’t think we as a country learned what we should have learned. At least, a large part of
our country didn’t learn it. We went into World War II and every war, with the intent of
winning it until Vietnam. And even Korea, to some extent. The political limitations
began to show themselves in Korea and I certainly believe in a civilian Commander in
Chief—the President—but beyond that, I think everybody in the House and Senate and in
Congress ought to keep their cotton-picking hands off of it and let the military fight and
win the war with the Commander in Chief at the top and we haven’t learned that yet.

RV: Do you read books or watch movies about what happened in Southeast Asia?
RM: No. I didn’t. In fact, I might say here, for a lot of years after the Vietnam
Memorial was built, I had no interest in going there. I didn’t want to go there. It was
part of—I just put most of that year basically out of my mind. I didn’t talk about it with
my family, I made no effort to contact any people that I had known over there until
finally—and I don’t know really what turned the corner, but at some point I came to grips
with the idea that I did want to go to the Vietnam Memorial. I felt like that was
something I needed to do. As I mentioned, I have a son-in-law who flies for Southwest
Airlines and so we were able to get some passes and we flew into the Baltimore-
Washington airport and made a trip to Washington, primarily to see the Vietnam
Memorial. We’d been there many times—not many times, several times—before and
we’d seen Washington and the sights but my wife and I went back primarily because I
felt like I needed to see and be at the Vietnam Memorial. And that began to kind of
reawaken—and I went to this B66 reunion as I mentioned and it rekindled some things
about the war. But for most of thirty years, I just put that year of my life, pretty much
just kind of erased it.

RV: What was your experience like at the Wall?
RM: Overwhelmed by the fact that my name was not there. And I think I came to
the realization that one of the reasons I had put it so much out of my mind is the guilt
factor. There’s guilt of, “Why did I come home and these fifty-eight thousand didn’t?”
There is a sense of guilt about that and of course it’s true of anything. A carload of people can be in a car accident and several of them die and one survives and I read accounts where that person deals with the guilt of “Why did I live and these others didn’t?”

RV: Survivor guilt.

RM: Survivor guilt, yeah. That’s what it’s called. So I never identified that until relatively recently when I look back and discover that that’s why I erased that from my mind, why I didn’t want to go to the Vietnam Memorial, and then I don’t know just what the turning point was but I decided that I did want to go. But being there, seeing those names, even the memorial here in Lubbock that we have, the war memorial we have over there, I take my children there and of course they’re grown adults and “Have you ever wondered what like would be like if my name was on that wall?” There’s a real survivor guilt that I still feel to some extent. So I don’t know that I—from a real philosophical point of view I can’t wrap up any great stones that were unturned that shed light on my life. It was a year in time that I did my job. I think I did it reasonably well and I moved on and did some other jobs and life has been good for me. I’ve been blessed beyond measure. I wouldn’t do hardly anything over again. I’ve had a fifty-year marriage that’s going strong, I’ve had three children that are on the right track and doing well, seven grandchildren, all teenagers and beyond that are doing well and so life has treated me way beyond what I deserve.

RV: How’s it been doing this oral history and talking about your past and specifically, your time in Vietnam?

RM: It’s all right. It got me into my files, digging through some orders and some paperwork and I got into my logbook and on a scratchpad I tallied up how many of my missions were in C-models and how many were in E-models and how many missions went where. For example, I had twenty-two of these Tiny Tim missions supporting B52 strikes, I had eleven missions in direct support of the Navy—Navy only strikes—I had sixty-one of my missions involving air refueling, sixty-one of those hundred and twenty-one involved air refueling. So it got me back into my logbook, back into my orders, seeing some names on the orders, those orders that I hadn’t seen or thought of in thirty-five years. So preparing for—not that I prepared, necessarily, other than just to dig
through some things—for this interview and talking about these things has been
enjoyable. I thought it would be—well, I didn’t know that we’d have more than thirty
minutes to talk about but I see you’ve pulled about five hours out of me. It’s been a
positive experience for me.

RV: Well, we’ll end the interview now with Dick Moser. Thank you very much
for your time, sir.

RM: You bet.