Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I’m conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Donald Davis. Today is March 6, 2003. It’s a little after 11:00 AM Central Standard Time. I am in Lubbock, Texas at Texas Tech University in the Southwest Collections, Special Collections Library Interview room. Mr. Davis you are in Oxner, California is that correct?

DD: That’s correct.

RV: Ok, great. Sir, if we could start with some biographical information on yourself. Could you tell us when and where you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

DD: Yes, I was born in Tulia, Texas.

RV: Not too far from here.

DD: I grew up there, graduated from high school there.

RV: What year did you graduate high school sir?

DD: 1942.

RV: How would you describe your childhood in Tulia, what was it like?

DD: It was a quiet little country town, very comfortable place, very safe. Everybody knew everybody. It was a nice friendly place, a nice environment to grow up in.

RV: How many brothers and sisters did you have?
DD: I have two bothers and one sister.
RV: Were they older or younger than you?
DD: The sister is older and the brothers are younger.
RV: What did your parents do for a living?
DD: My father was a rancher. A ranch manager and my mother was at one time
the county clerk in Swisher County. Later she reverted to a housewife role.
RV: What kind of ranch did your father work on or manage?
DD: It was a cattle ranch.
RV: What kind of memories do you have of the Great Depression? You were
born in ’25 so you were a young boy at that time, do you have memories of that time?
DD: Yes, I have some memories of it, but the situation was such that in a rural
area like that there was no shortage of food. Both my grandparents lived there. They had
big vegetable gardens and maybe butchered a pig or something. There was never any
deep pervasion in that respect. Of course nobody had much money but we didn’t know
we were poor.
RV: So it was a normal childhood to you as you could describe it as such?
DD: Yes, I’d say so.
RV: Did any of your relatives serve in World War I or World War II?
DD: Yes, my father served in World War I.
RV: Really, what did he do in the war?
DD: He was in the transportation corps in the 3rd Army in France.
RV: Did he tell you, talk to you about his experiences in Europe?
DD: Yes, to some degree.
RV: What kind of emphasis did he place on you or any of your brothers going
into the military?
DD: He was very supportive. After World War I he stayed in the Army of
occupation until 1920. When he came back from the States he joined the Texas National
Guard for a year or two. He was as strong military supporter and always encouraged me.
RV: What do you remember about your early schooling there in Tulia, what was
that like?
DD: It was just we had a small class. There were less than 30 people in my class.

Of course the school was so small that you knew everybody in the school and their
family. Again it was a very friendly environment. My only problem was my sister was a
straight “A” student. Of course she preceded me through the school system. Everybody
expected me to perform to her standards.

RV: Did that happen?

DD: I didn’t perform to her standard, but I did all right.

RV: What were your favorite subjects in school?

DD: I’d say math and science, physics and chemistry, stuff like that.

RV: Did that come easy to you? Did you have a natural inclination to the
sciences or was it some thing that you were just really interested in?

DD: It was just some thing I was interested in. I had decided I wanted to get into
engineering. I knew I had to have the background in those courses to qualify.

RV: Do you remember anything about Franklin Roosevelt as president?

DD: Yes.

RV: Can you talk to me a little bit about that? What did you think of him as
president?

DD: I recall when he declared war on Japan and Germany.

RV: Yes, sir I bet you do.

DD: In fact I was well aware of his being there long before that because he was
elected when I was just starting school. I was well aware that he was the president. As
the war progressed I became acutely aware of his part as commander and chief. Of
course I went in the Army in 1943. Of course he was still the president.

RV: Yes, sir. Now when you were in high school in Tulia, did you plan to try to
go to college or were you looking at a military career? I mean this is there in the ‘40s so
the war was on. Was everybody kind of looking to the military?

DD: Well, I was. The first thing I did… I was 17 when I graduated from high
school. So I went down and enrolled at Texas A&M for one semester. I went home at
the end of that semester and the draft board who I knew well advised me not to go back
because I was going to be drafted. I had one semester in college at Texas A&M before I
went in the Army.
RV: Were you in fact drafted or did you go in and enlist yourself?

DD: I volunteered to get into the Army’s flying training program.

RV: What made you want to get into the flying training?

DD: I don’t know. I thought flying was the neat thing to do. I had a friend who had an airplane and had a few rides. I decided that if I was going to the war, I’d just as soon go in an airplane. I’d prefer to go in an airplane.

RV: What did your parents think about you going into the military and going off to war?

DD: Well, my mother didn’t accept it too well of course. My father understood my feelings, which reflected his when he was my age. He was very supportive.

RV: How would you describe the mood of the United States, the population during World War II?

DD: Everybody was highly energized to win that war and do whatever they could to help. Whether it was join the military or go to work for the defense plan or stay home and run the farm. Whatever it took, the best they could do. I think everybody was pretty well oriented to supporting the war effort and doing what they could to help.

RV: Did you ever see the United States population in the 20th century after World War II ever behave like that again? Ever be unified like that again?

DD: No, I don’t believe I did.

RV: Obviously in contrast with what happened during the Vietnam years with so much dissention.

DD: Say again.

RV: It obviously contrasted with what happened during the Vietnam years in the ‘60s and the ‘70s. You go to see both ends of the spectrum.

DD: Say again.

RV: You got to see both ends of the spectrum.

DD: Yes, I did.

RV: Tell me bout your initial training at the Army air corps.

DD: I just went through the standard flight-training program. First we had to go to basic training just like we had enlisted. That lasted about a month.

RV: Where was that sir?
DD: Biloxi, Mississippi.

RV: Was that difficult for you?

DD: No because I just finished a semester in the ROTC.

RV: So at A&M you enrolled in the ROTC.

DD: In fact it gave me a leg up because I already knew how to do close ordered drill. That was one of my payoffs for that semester I spent at Texas A&M.

RV: So you were able to adapt to the military lifestyle fairly easily?

DD: Yes.

RV: What kind of memories do you have of basic training?

DD: I was in an unusual group. I just came from civilian life and a number of us arrived from down there on the train. When my class started they had just started to allow enlisted people to go through the training in grate. Prior to that they had to take a bust to get into the flying program. We had master sergeants on down in my squadron, my basic squadron. That was kind of interesting because I recall we had a corporal who was in charge of our flight. He has maybe six master sergeants and a few tecs and right on down and about half of us were basic trainees. It made kind of an interesting situation because those old sergeants didn’t take too kindly to a corporal telling them what to do.

RV: Is that so? How did you guys adapt to that? Was that difficult?

DD: It didn’t last very long because we had all those people among us. They sent us off to college training detachment for three months in college.

RV: Where was that?

DD: Michigan College of Mining and Technology.

RV: Up in Michigan?


RV: What did you do there exactly?

DD: They jus gave us one semester of a basic engineering course, math and physics and related course that you would normally expect on the first year of college.

RV: Why did they do that? Why did they send you all up there?

DD: They didn’t have enough room in the training program. That was kind of holding plus it gave us a leg up on getting started.
RV: So when you finished that semester up in Michigan did you return down to Biloxi?

DD: No, we shipped out to Santa Ana, California to the Army basic flying school.

RV: Was that the first time that you were able to actually train in airplanes?

DD: At Santa Ana there was no flying, it was all-academic.

RV: So it was all classroom?

DD: Yes, and what they call classification. They gave us a series of psychomotor tests to determine whether we were going to be pilots or navigators or bombardiers.

RV: How did you perform on those tests?

DD: I did very well.

RV: What was your classification?

DD: Pilot.

RV: Is that what you wanted to be?

DD: Yes.

RV: I didn’t know if you wanted to be a support person.

DD: No. I wanted to be a pilot.

RV: What did your parents think about you going so far away from home and then going into being a pilot, which was at that time really dangerous?

DD: I think by that time my mother had pretty well accepted my fate. Of course my father was still quite enthusiastic about me getting into the program and the possibility of me getting a commission, he liked that.

RV: Was your training kind of geared toward finishing it as quickly as possible and then getting overseas? Would you say it was kind of average and you were trained thoroughly before you would go anywhere?

DD: It was a standardized program. You spent about three months in primary training. Three months in basic and three months in advanced. You started off of course with the primary training aircraft and worked your way up to advanced trainers.

RV: So tell me what it was like when you first got behind the controls and you flew?
DD: It was pretty exciting for me. I had a good experience. The uniform for
flying consisted of a cloth helmet with goggles. When we started flying everybody had
to wear the goggles around their neck. As soon as you soloed then you would wear the
goggles up on your head. This was a badge of accomplishment. I was the first one in my
class to solo. The next week the weather got bad and nobody else soloed. So I was the
only guy in the squadron that had goggles on.
RV: I bet you were proud of that? Phoebe
DD: Yes (laughs).
RV: How was flying to you? Was it difficult or did it come easy to you?
DD: I had a fairly natural talent for it. It was always fairly easy for me and I got
good ratings.
RV: Did you receive really good instruction there?
DD: The primary instructors were civilians. Of course they were old timers and
they were really good. As we advanced through the programs like when we got into
advanced training I had an instructor who just graduated the class ahead of me.
RV: Wow.
DD: The quality of instruction wasn’t quite as good. They had a system of check
flights that you had to take as you progressed through the programs.
RV: What kind of aircraft were you flying as you progressed through the
program?
DD: The primary trainer was a PT-22. The basic trainer was a BT-13 known as
the vultee vibrator. An advanced trainer was an AT-17, which was a Cessna Bobcat.
RV: Which of those three planes did you like the best?
DD: I guess the primary trainer.
RV: Really? Why is that?
DD: You could do all the acrobatics in it. A little more of a challenge to fly. The
larger airplanes are more stable but there are fewer things you can do.
RV: Did they allow you to do acrobatics?
DD: That was part of the course.
RV: Really?
DD: Yes.
RV: What other tactics did they teach you there as you went through your training?

DD: Primarily it was just flying. Of course there was ground school and they teach you weather and navigation and mechanics and aerodynamics.

RV: When you finished your advanced training, where did you go?

DD: I went to Carlsbad, New Mexico to a bombardier school. I flew training mission for the bombardier cadets. I did that until the war ended a year or so later.

RV: Did you expect to get into the war?

DD: The system was that if you stayed in the training command like I did you could expect to stay there a year and then go to a combat assignment. Of course the war was over about the time I came through for the combat assignment.

RV: Were you disappointed?

DD: I wouldn’t say disappointed. I got married and I had some other things to do. Of course I planned to go right back to college, which I did at the end of World War II.

RV: So when you finished your bombardier training, you went back to college?

DD: Yes.

RV: What airplanes were you flying in bombardier training?

DD: AT-11s.

RV: AT-11s. Where did you go back to college?

DD: I went to the University of Colorado.

RV: Did you end up graduating there?

DD: Yes, I did.

RV: What years were you at the university of Colorado?

DD: ’46 through ’49.

RV: What did you study there?

DD: Mechanical engineering.

RV: It seems like you had a natural talent for engineering.
DD: Early sometime in my academic career some instructor that I respected told me that I ought to be an engineer. So I guess that’s one reason I kind of got started in that direction.

RV: Were you part of any of the military programs at University of Colorado while you were there?

DD: No, I was a GI Bill student. $90.00 a month.

RV: That’s what it cost you, or that’s what you would receive?

DD: That’s what I would receive.

RV: How much a role did the GI Bill play in you going to college?

DD: In my case, it just made it a lot easier. My family could hardly afford to send me especially since I had gotten married. So the GI Bill was really a Godsend for me. It allowed me to go to school and my wife worked. We came out just fine.

RV: Let me ask you about April 1945. How did you feel or do you remember how you felt when Franklin Roosevelt died?

DD: I just remember it was a sad day. It was just kind of a gloomy situation. There was not much ___ around the officer’s club. That’s about all I remember.

RV: What was your impression of Harry Truman?

DD: My original impression was that he was a hick, haberdasher from Missouri. As things progressed I grew to have a lot of respect for him. In fact the first time I voted, I voted for him.

RV: When you graduated from Colorado in 1949, this is right before the Korean War is going to start, did you go back into the military or did you remain a civilian?

DD: I joined the Colorado Air National Guard.

RV: Air National Guard. Where were you stationed?

DD: At Denver, Buckley Air Base.

RV: What did you do there?

DD: I was a communications, maintenance officer.

RV: When you were there how long was it until the Korean War started?

DD: It had actually started about the time I joined the Air Guard. They sent me to communications school for a year.

RV: Where was that?
DD: At Scott Air Force Base, Illinois.

RV: What did you learn there at Scott?

DD: All facets of communications, electronics and maintenance, code and radios and climbing poles and stringing wires. The whole gamut of communications.

RV: Had you been moving away from being a pilot on purpose? Was this just kind of what the Army Air Corps wanted to do with you?

DD: This was the opportunity I had to go to the school.

RV: Did it benefit your career later do you think?

DD: Yes, it did. Shortly after I got out of school they federalized my guard unit and sent my squadron to Germany.

RV: Was this in 1951?

DD: Yes.

RV: So you went to Germany, where were you stationed in Germany?

DD: Initially in Lamsburg with headquarters 12th Air Force.

RV: What were your duties there?

DD: I was a communications maintenance officer.

RV: Can you describe kind of what you would do there on base?

DD: We maintained the base communications system. Our primary function was to support the headquarters 12 Air Force on field maneuvers. We had a lot of all wheel radio equipment and teletype equipment. We had three fighter wings that we maintained communication with the headquarters and those three fighter wings.

RV: Was there ever threat of you being called up and sent to Korea or did you know that you would probably stay in Europe?

DD: I knew I was going to be in Europe for three years.

RV: So it was a three-year tour?

DD: Yes.

RV: How was Germany for you? Was your wife able to come over?

DD: Yes, she was, she did. Our second child was born there. The first year we lived in requisitioned housing, which was a little cottage out in Bavaria. We had a full time maid and gardener that kept the mowing the yard up. So it was pretty cushy living.

RV: Sounds like it. What rank were you when you were in Germany?
DD: I was a First Lieutenant.

RV: Tell me what you think about the Korean War, what are your memories of that conflict?

DD: A little bit negative because I didn’t think that we were prepared for what happened. If you recall things like the Chosen Reservoir where the people were freezing to death up there in the North and getting trapped. Then we got trapped by the Chinese Communists up there. It just seemed to be that it wasn’t too well planned. Wasn’t too well commanded.

RV: Who did you blame for that? Was that the White House’s fault or was that the military commander’s fault or just everybody was caught off guard?

DD: Ultimately it’s the commander in chiefs’ fault. The civilian element that got us into the war.

RV: I’m sorry.

DD: I said the military just responds. You may have your private opinions but when you’re sent up there to do a job, you do it.

RV: Did you agree with President Truman and the United States saying that it was a police action, kind of a United Nations police action versus a war?

DD: I looked at it more like war. I was aware of people I knew that were over there getting shot at and shot down. I didn’t see it so much as a police action.

RV: Did you continue your flying while you were in Germany?

DD: Yes, I did.

RV: I guess you had to stay qualified.

DD: Yes. I was what they called proficiency flying. I had to fly at least four hours a month just to get paid.

RV: What were you flying over in Germany?

DD: C-47s.

RV: So you had gone to a larger transport type plane?

DD: Yes.

RV: How did you like the transports versus the smaller aircraft?

DD: I liked it all right. I didn’t have any combat experience at that time. The C-47 was kind of a natural step-up from the At-11, which I had a lot of time in. It was an
easy transition for me to go to the C-47. I enjoyed it. You had a lot of interesting flying
top there. In the wintertime in Germany the weather is always bad so I got a lot of weather
time. It was a lot of good flying experience.
RV: One other question about the Korean War, what did you think of President
Truman relieving General Macarthur?
DD: I thought it was a great idea.
RV: Really? Why did you feel that way?
DD: Because I thought McArthur was incompetent.
RV: Why so, because he had performed poorly on the peninsula or what?
DD: He wanted us to go into China. Even I knew that was not a good idea.
RV: So you think Truman did the right thing and kind of got rid of him?
DD: Yes, indeed I certainly do.
RV: What was your impression of Dwight Eisenhower, the next president?
DD: He’s one of my heroes.
RV: Really?
DD: Yes.
RV: Why do you feel that way?
DD: I thought he was a good commander. He had come up through the school of
hard knocks. I thought he did a very good job in Europe and all through World War II
that plays in his career.
RV: You think he was a pretty effective president?
DD: Yes, I do. Not as spectacular as some might have liked. When you look
back on his term as president, I think you’d have to conclude that he did a very good job.
RV: So, 1954 is that when you left Germany?
DD: Yes.
RV: Where did you go from Germany?
DD: I went to the Air Force Institute of Technology for a couple of years and got
a graduate degree.
RV: What was your degree in?
DD: Armament systems engineering.
RV: Ok, can you explain why you got into that?
DD: Why did I?

RV: Yes, sir.

DD: It was an opportunity to get a graduate degree. That was the only thing that I was elected for. I didn’t have any choice for what course to take.

RV: Why were you elected that course particularly?

DD: I suppose because I had an engineering background. Plus my electronics experience. Armament systems engineering is kind of a combination of electrical engineering and aeronautical engineering and mechanical engineering. It all kind of fit together.

RV: How long was that training?

DD: Two years.

RV: Ok, so ’54 to ’56. What kind of stuff did you learn there? Was it working on aircraft or was it kind of general?

DD: It was aircraft, fire control systems.

RV: What systems were you working on at the time?

DD: What we did was we redesigned the fire control system of the B-29. This was one of the first bombers that had remotely controlled guns, where the gunner had a site and the guns were somewhere else on the airplane. He wasn’t sitting behind the machine gun firing out the way. So that was an early advance in fire control technology. Also we were exposed to the computing gunsights, which were just starting to use in the fighters.

RV: Did you do any flying of the B-29?

DD: No, you just had mock-ups in the lab to work with.

RV: When you finished this training in 1956, where did you go?

DD: I went to Cape Canaveral.

RV: Really? What were your duties there?

DD: I was a Range Safety Officer.

RV: What did you do? What exactly was Range Safety Officer?

DD: Of course most of the missile launches were done by contractors. We worked with them and we came up with a safety plan for each flight. We worked with them and we came up with a safety plane for each flight, each test. The predefined limits
in which we were attempting to confine the flight. We didn’t put any missile into
Orlando, or Miami. Everything had to stay within certain confines in each direction. We
had a radio control, what they call destruct device, and we could blow up the missile.

RV: What kind of missiles were they?
DD: Well, to start with, we had the Army’s Red Stone, and then we had the Air
Force Thor, the Air Force Atlas and the Air Force Titan. The Boeing Bomarc, North
American Snark. A lot of other kinds of experimental stuff like that.

RV: Did you enjoy that work?
DD: Say again.
RV: Did you enjoy that work?
DD: Yes. It was very interesting. We had so many firsts. Kept you on your
toes. Stay up to speed with what was happening so you could do your job without being
a hazard to the flight.

RV: You were kind of there at the dawn of the missile age for the United States?
DD: Yes, I was. In fact I participated in the first two manned flights.

RV: Did you really?
DD: Yes.

RV: What did you do?
DD: I was the Marine safety officer.

RV: Ok, the same thing. What years were you there at Canaveral?
DD: ’56 to ’61.

RV: That sounds like really interesting work. What were the first manned flights
like? What do you remember about that time period?
DD: I’m sitting right here looking at a picture of Alan Sheperad. A picture of
that missile lifting off the pad with him on top of it.

RV: Did you meet Alan?
DD: Yes.

RV: Did you guys work with the astronauts?
DD: Yes, we did. They had a lot of other stuff to worry about. They were pretty
interested in what we were doing. We were sitting there with our thumb on the switch
and we could terminate the flight any time we needed to.
RV: What kind of things would make you hit that switch and terminate a flight. What were you looking for?

DD: If something catastrophic happened to a missile shortly after lift off if it tumbled or something like that. Once it got flying we had all kinds of tracking devices, radar and optical trackers. We could keep track of where the missile was going. Then later on we got a little more sophisticated. We got a computerized impact predictor, which showed us as the missile proceeded down range if we cut off the engine exactly where it would end up. That took a lot of the sweat out of it. It did a lot of our thinking for us. We just had to pretty much layout the area that we wanted to confine the impacts to. Usually everything went pretty good. Early in the programs there were a lot of missile failures where the missile would lift off the pad and then fall right back down through the flame bucket. It took a little while for things to level out because everything was so experimental.

RV: What was the mood there when these accidents occurred?

DD: The test directors were not too happy of course. But they never caused us any problems. We always had good cause to take any action if we did. We had a good record.

RV: When these launches were taking place were you inside there with flight control? Did you have your own panel and chair there or were you isolated somewhere else?

DD: I was isolate from the test. We had our own plotting boards and instrumentation and communications. I had guys out with what we call the vertical wire ___ which would define the plane in space and they could tell if the missile was programmed in the down range or direction or not. It was pretty well coordinated for me. We had a lot of other safety things to take care of. For example we had to keep track of all the aircraft in the vicinity of the Cape to be sure there was nobody in the launching area. Also we had to keep track of the small boats that had tendency to show up off shore. We had people to patrol that area out there. If somebody entered the area that didn’t belong I would have to take some action.

RV: What would they do?
DD: They’d depart. Nobody ever gave us any problems. Most people were there just by accident. It was curiosity.

RV: Were you ever outside during one of these launches?

DD: Yes, I shared this duty with three other officers. Each of us was assigned one or two or more missiles. You were the primary guy, you manned the consol and actually made all the decisions. The other guys manned other instrumentation or were outside observers and were receiving information through the intercom.

RV: Did you like being inside or outside better?

DD: I liked the inside because you had all the information funneled into that point. You could see everything that was going on.

RV: Can you compare working with NASA at Cape Canaveral versus what happened with NASA today and the advances made with the space shuttle and all that?

DD: It’s surprisingly very much the same. Of course as the vehicles got more complex, the procedures got more complex. The instrumentation and the control center and the displays and the way they handle the data all stayed pretty much the same. In fact it’s pretty much the same today except the launch is bigger and better vehicles. We have more spectacular accidents of course.

RV: Yes, sir. Let me ask you about President Kennedy. When he took office he kind of invigorated the country with his youthfulness. What was your impression of such a young president and then his statements about going to the moon and things like that?

DD: I was favorably impressed with him going into office. I was pretty much a dedicated republican by the time he was elected. I thought he was real suited for that job.

RV: Were you still flying while you were at the Cape?

DD: Yes.

RV: What aircraft were you flying?

DD: Well we had C-47s, C-54s, SA-16s. UC-78s are all support type aircraft.

RV: So 1961, where were you transferred from there?

DD: I went to Commander Staff College.

RV: Was that a yearlong course for you?

DD: That was a year, yes.

RV: What did you learn there? What was that like for you?
DD: It's pretty much what the name implies. It teaches all elements of command and all the staff support jobs. A lot of emphasis on public speaking and communications. One course that I probably enjoyed more than any other is they teach you how to listen to a speech. You could classify a speech in two or three different ways. There was some to instruct, some to inspire or maybe a combination. Every time I hear somebody start to make a speech I immediately start to classify what they are doing.

RV: That’s interesting. What else do they tell you? What else do they teach you there?

DD: We did writing, published papers and stuff like that. We had a lot of lectures. All kinds of outside people.

RV: Were you a captain or major at this point?

DD: I was a captain.

RV: You finish in what, 1962 there at the college?

DD: Yes.

RV: Where did you go from there?

DD: I went to Headquarters Systems Command.

RV: Where was that located?

DD: At Andrews Air Force Base.

RV: What did you do during the missile crisis in 1962?

DD: During the missile crisis?

RV: Yes, sir what do you remember about the Cuban missile crisis in 1962?

DD: Of course I was living on ground zero.

RV: I know at Andrews, yes sir.

DD: Of course we were concerned. I don’t recall any sense of panic so to speak. Of course we kept close watch on what was happening as the thing progressed. It didn’t last very long.

RV: Did you have any special duties or instruction during that time period at your job?

DD: No.

RV: What exactly was your job there at headquarters?

DD: The first year I was there I was assigned to the Inspector General’s office.
RV: What did you do?

DD: We went around the command and made safety inspections of all the different organizations in the command. After two years they organized a division called the National Range Division, which was responsible for Cape Canaveral and Vandenberg, Alamogordo. Primarily at that level you’re primarily interested in getting funding for your subordinate groups. I spent a lot of time in that sort of activity. Also I was still wearing my Range safety hat. I got involved in some accident investigations, required quite a bit of my time.

RV: What kind of accident investigations?

DD: We had at Vandenberg, back in the early days of Vandenberg we had a missile that malfunctioned shortly after liftoff. The safety officer blew it up and it fell back on the base. In fact a piece of the missile penetrated the roof of a house trailer in the enlisted housing area. It didn’t hurt anybody but of course caused a lot of concern. So we had a big investigation of the whole thing. I was involved in that. Made some recommendations for how to improve the safety in the situation.

RV: It sounds like throughout your career at this point you have kind of excelled at being a leader. A lot of very important positions especially investigating accidents and being in charge of whether or not to destruct missiles, how did you progress into that? Was leadership something that came naturally to you? Were you very comfortable with that or was it more difficult?

DD: I don’t know. I have to give my old scoutmaster some credit. I was an Eagle Scout. That kind of set the tone. I kind of expected to succeed. I had, for example I had three consecutive below the zone promotions.

RV: That was from captain, major, to?

DD: Captain major to lieutenant colonel.

RV: So you progressed rather rapidly then through that rank?

DD: Yes, a little more rapid than normal.

RV: After your two years at Andrews where did you go?

DD: I stayed there the National Range division was also collocated there. The commander of the National Range division was my old boss from Patrick. He wanted me
in there instead of over in the IG. SO I got out of the IG job early and got back into the
range business.

RV: What year was this when you transferred over?
DD: ’64.

RV: So you stayed there basically at Andrews?
DD: Yes.

RV: What kind of position was that for you? What were your duties there? Was
it very similar to what you had done before?
DD: No. I was called an engineer staff officer. It’s more clerical work than
actually getting out and doing stuff.

RV: How long did you do that?

RV: In ’67 what happened?
DD: I was sitting there minding my own business getting ready to transfer out to
Vandenburg and I got a set of orders telling me to go to survival school and combat
replacement training. I found myself on my way to Vietnam.

RV: At this point in 1967, the United State is very heavily involved in Vietnam.

Did you follow what was happening in the war?
DD: Yes.

RV: What were your impressions of what was going on at that point?
DD: Well, I guess that early I wasn’t opinionated. I resented having to go. I
accepted it as part of my job. I did it. As time went on after I had been over there for a
year I kind of formed a different opinion.

RV: Why did you resent having to go when you were called?
DD: Number one I had two kids in high school. Two young boys in high school.
I had a job waiting for me at Vandenburg that would have probably got me another
promotion.

RV: What kind of job was that?
DD: It was the range safety director out there.

RV: You’re at this point, 42 years old I think is that correct?
DD: Yes.
RV: How did your family feel about you getting orders to go eventually over to Vietnam to Southeast Asia?
DD: My wife was very unhappy about that.
RV: Why did she feel that way?
DD: She knew I was going to be gone for a year and a half.
RV: So you had a year and half tour, versus a one year?
DD: I’m sorry it was 14 months.
RV: Tell me about survival school, where was this located?
DD: It was up in Washington at Fairchild.
RV: What was that like?
DD: The school up there was set up for SAC pilots. Primarily north was an artic survival. That’s what we did. They had a survival area, which was out there in the woods. They keep us up there and you learn how to cook rabbits and build huts and survive in that respect. Then we had another phase was escape and evasion where you pretend that you just crashed your airplane some place and you had to try to get back to your friendly area. Of course nobody made it and they put you in prison and interrogate you. You had some feeling of what it might be like.
RV: How did you do there at survival school?
DD: By my standard did very well. I’m not sure the school was too happy with me.
RV: Why is that?
DD: That type of training was mostly role-play. I kept trying to jazz the course up a little bit. Everybody was just doing things by the numbers. I was kind of fighting the faculty a little bit.
RV: What kind of things would you do to jazz it up?
DD: I would assume a role of a prisoner that went over to the enemy side. Stuff like that.
RV: How long did the survival school last?
DD: A couple of months.
RV: A couple of months?
DD: Yes.
RV: Were you able to have contact with your family during this time?

DD: Yes. I could write them every day or two.

RV: Did this include your 14 months, or was this in addition to your 14-month tour?

DD: In addition.

RV: When you finished survival school, how did you get over to Southeast Asia?

DD: First I had to go to the C-130 school.

RV: So you’re going to pilot C-130s?

DD: Yes.

RV: Where was this located?

DD: At Seward Air Force Base.

RV: What were the C-130s like for you?

DD: I really enjoyed flying the airplane because it had a lot of characteristics that I was accustomed to. It was a big stable airplane. Could carry a big load. It was light and very maneuverable. I have to admit that I really enjoyed flying that airplane.

RV: I’ve heard that often about C-130s that it was a pretty comfortable airplane to fly.

DD: Yes.

RV: How long did your pilot training for the C-130 last?

DD: I believe it was three months.

RV: Did you take to it quite easily?

DD: Yes.

RV: After you finished this, now you’re heading off to Southeast Asia, what year was this?

DD: ’67.

RV: ’67? How did you actually get over to Southeast Asia, did you fly on a C-130?

DD: No, I flew commercial.

RV: Did you really?

DD: I was actually assigned to a squadron in Taiwan.

RV: At CCK?
DD: CCK, right.

RV: What was that flight over like? Do you remember the mood on the plane?

DD: Uneventful. I remember we stopped in Honolulu for fuel. That’s about all. I slept a lot.

RV: How did you feel about kind of going into a war zone, did that bother you any?

DD: Not really. I guess I felt a certain amount of security because I was always flying the airplane.

RV: Right, that’s true.

DD: I guess maybe not rightly so I guess you get to so you feel invincible. I never had any serious troubles with it. We got shot at a lot. Actually you could see it because they’d fire tracers. They never even came close.

RV: Tell me what your base was like there at Taiwan. What were your living quarters like and that sort of thing?

DD: They were fairly good. We shared a base with a Chinese fighter unit. The buildings were corrugated metal but they had all the indoor plumbing. You had a nice mess and nice club. Comfortable place to work.

RV: What was the morale of your comrades there, the people in your unit?

DD: I’d say it was pretty good. The thing that was unusual about it I reported in there as a Lieutenant Colonels. There were 19 Lieutenant Colonels in my squadron.

RV: Really? That’s an inordinate amount.

DD: I was the junior one.

RV: Why did they do that?

DD: Initially a normal tour over there was a year. So the guys that go over and stay for a year and then come back to the States, after about two years they start running out of pilots. They were pulling guys like me out of desk jobs and putting them back in the cockpit. That’s where all those guys came from. They were all different jobs in the Air Force. We all ended up in that squadron as aircraft commander flying combat missions in Vietnam.

RV: How did you get along with everyone?

DD: Ok. Of course it was a very mature group.
RV: Yes, sir exactly. How did everyone feel? This is a mature group of lieutenant colonels, how did everyone feel about the war effort? Do you remember what was discussed?

DD: I don’t recall a lot of negativity. Our workload was pretty well defined. Everybody pretty much knew what they were doing. We dint’ have a lot of problems. It was just the inconvenience of having to go down there. When we went in country then we lived on a temporary base down there that was not barely as nice as our home base.

RV: How long did you stay in country when you would go?

DD: We’d go down there for about three weeks at a time.

RV: You would fly your missions from that base?

DD: Yes.

RV: And then come back to Taiwan for a week or so and then go back?

DD: Usually less than that. Being the junior Lieutenant Colonel I got to be the Scheduling Officer. When I was not in country I was scheduling other flights. I had a full time job.

RV: At this point, what was your understanding of what the United States was trying to accomplish in Vietnam?

DD: I assumed we were trying to reinforce the South Vietnamese and get them strong enough to fend for themselves. Of course that never happened.

RV: Right. Did you think that the Vietnamese were being capable of being built up to defend themselves or did you think they would always be dependent on someone else?

DD: I guess by the time I left there I was convinced it was really a lost cause.

RV: I wonder could you describe kind of a typical day for you while you were in Taiwan at CCK?

DD: It was just a normal workday. I would go down to my office at 8:00 in the morning and schedule all the flights for that day, take care of my personal business. I’d do that for maybe a week. Then I’d schedule myself to go back into Vietnam for three weeks.

RV: How often did you have to go into Vietnam? Did everybody have a quota they had to meet?
DD: No, not really. We had so many airplanes and so many crews. We just kept rotating first in, first out. Yes. Did I say that right?

RV: First, in first out?

DD: The first to come back would be the last to go back.

RV: Right they’d get at the bottom of the list and the next person would rotate in.

DD: Yes, so we just rotated the crews. The same thing happened with the airplanes. We’d fly the airplanes back to CCK for maintenance and then take an aircraft that had been maintained and fly it back down there.

RV: What base did you guys fly into in Vietnam?

DD: Primarily Tuy Hoa.

RV: Can you describe that base and your living quarters there and what base life was like?

DD: We lived in what they called hooches, which is a tent with a wooden floor and a wooden wall.

RV: Ok. How many men would live inside one of your hooches?

DD: Maybe eight.

RV: What kind of amenities did you have? Was it air conditioned? Did you have good cots?

DD: No there was no air conditioning. Just pull the flaps up on the tent, side flaps to keep it cool.

RV: How did you get along with all the men there in your tent, in your hooch?

DD: No problem. We were all very busy, flying everyday. Very few personal problems or conflicts. Everybody knew their job.

RV: Did you ever form any special relationships with any of the men? Any good long lasting friendships?

DD: I did with my crew. When I flew I always flew with the same co-pilot and navigator and loadmaster.

RV: Can you tell me a little bit about your crew and your aircraft? Can you describe the C-130 and where everybody was positioned and what your duties were?

DD: Of course the pilot sat in the left front.

RV: Were you always the pilot?
DD: Yes.
RV: Go ahead sir.
RV: Lieutenant colonel, they called us aircraft commanders.
RV: Yes, sir.
DD: The pilot sits in the left front seat; co-pilot sits in the right front seat. Between the pilot and the co-pilot and sitting back a bit is the flight engineer. He keeps an eye on the engines and that sort of thing. Behind the pilot was the navigator’s position. Then the loadmaster lived in the back of the airplane. He kept an eye on the cargo.
RV: Can you describe what your typical day was like there at Tuy Hoa.
DD: You might go up to Na Ha and pick up some freight and take it up to Da Nang or you might go to Da Nang and take some freight to Kang Tri or some place up there. When Tet started we flew a lot of stuff in to Khe Sahn.
RV: What was that experience like, the Tet Offensive at Khe Sahn?
DD: It was a bit hair raising because there was a lot of ground fire up there. I landed a few times up there, pretty early during the Offensive they stopped letting us go in there in the C-130s.
RV: Why did they do that?
DD: Because the runway was getting beat up. They didn’t want to take a chance on losing an airplane. Also there was a lot of incoming. We frequently did get hits on the loading ramp and out on the ends of the runway.
RV: You said you flew in a few times and landed. Would you land off load and take off as quickly as possible?
DD: Yes. We did what they called speed off load. You just stopped, dropped the ramp and then accelerate the airplane and then drive right out from under the load. You just lay it right out on the ramp.
RV: Did you do any airdrops?
DD: Yes, I did several. We had a drop zone, which was up off the west end of the runway. I don’t know how many, maybe a half a dozen or so air drops I flew up there. Probably the most interesting of those, when the weather was bad the Marine Corps had GCA unit. We’d fly GCA approach. GCA operator put us over the end of the
runway. Then the navigator would navigate from there to the center of the drop zone.
We got pretty good at it, keeping stuff confined to the drop one.

RV: What kind of things would you carry into Khe Sahn?
DD: Mostly food and clothing, ammunition.

RV: Were there any particular incidents you remember about those flights into Khe Sahn? Anything happen that stands out in your memory today?
DD: The last time that I landed there it was a pretty tense operation because there was a lot of ground fire. We landed and took off almost immediately. I got another air medal for doing that.

RV: Did you really?
DD: Yes.

RV: What kind of things would you carry around Vietnam? What was your cargo like?
DD: It could be anything like artillery pieces, jeeps, all kinds of clothing, food and ammo, passengers, a lot of passengers.

RV: Were these American troops or Vietnamese troops or both?
DD: It just happened that most of our troops were Marines. We supported things up in the north end of the country, which was Marine territory. We flew a lot of Marines in there.

RV: Were there any particular bases that you flew into that are very distinct or something that stands out about those bases going into Quang Tri?
DD: Not really. They were all pretty much the same.

RV: Really?
DD: They were pretty primitive. Some of them had very few facilities.

RV: Were there any that were particularly dangerous to you besides Khe Sahn?
DD: No, not particularly. Like I say at night you could see the tracers coming up, which you didn’t see in the daytime so you didn’t even know they were there. It was a bit disconcerting to have that stuff coming up at you. Nobody ever came close to my airplane. I felt fairly secure.

RV: Your airplane was never hit by fire?
DD: No. About the only hits that anybody in our group took was once in a while when they were coming on the final approach down low the VC got a bullet into the wheel well, which was minor damage but still disconcerting.

RV: How did it feel to be shot at? What were your feelings?

DD: I guess once you realized they missed you there’s a feeling of exhilaration that you survived.

RV: Did you ever witness anyone being wounded there on the airplanes or elsewhere?

DD: I hauled a lot of wounded people out of there.

RV: What kind of contact did you have with these wounded? You were the aircraft commander did you ever talk to any of these soldiers?

DD: No, not really. We had litter patients. We usually had medics. We’d get them loaded and try to get them over to Da Nang, to the hospital as fast as possible.

RV: Did you ever carry dead bodies?

DD: Yes.

RV: How did you feel about that?

DD: Bad.

RV: Really?

DD: That was kind of tough. It kind of demoralized the crew. Back of the airplane full of these guys in those bags.

RV: What would they say about it?

DD: I had a loadmaster that broke down and cried.

RV: What are your general impressions of the enemy of the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong?

DD: The Vietnamese?

RV: Yes sir the enemy. The North Vietnamese and the Vietcong forces, what were your impressions of those?

DD: They were just highly motivated. They survived in situations that our guys had a lot of trouble with. There was an old joke about the Ho Chi Minh trail, give a guy two mortar rounds and send him 100 miles down that trail and he’d hand it to the gunner and the gunner would launch his tow missiles and they were going to go back and get two
more. That was pretty primitive operation but they seemed to be highly motivated and
tenacious.

RV: Were they kind of like you expected or were they different in a way?

DD: There was so little difference between the North and the South Vietnamese
from my viewpoint I guess I didn’t have a preconceived idea of what they could be like.

RV: Tell me what you thought of the Vietnamese themselves, the Vietnamese
civilians? What kind of contact did you have with them?

DD: Almost none.

RV: Did you from any impressions about them?

DD: Not any strong impressions. I don’t recall any really making an issue out of.

Just people trying to survive.

RV: What did you think of Vietnam itself the country?

DD: By the time I left there I saw it as a lost cause.

RV: Did you really? What kind of weapons did you guys carry on your
airplanes? Were you armed at all?

DD: Yes, we had M-16 rifles.

RV: Did you have a side arm?

DD: No.

RV: Did you wear body armor of any kind?

DD: Not when we were flying out.

RV: Did you ever work with any troops from the South Vietnamese Army or say
the Australians or New Zealanders or South Koreans?

DD: No.

RV: No exposure to them at all?

DD: No.

RV: Did you hear rumors about the South Vietnamese Army and their
capabilities?

DD: No. Not that I recall.

RV: Let’s talk a little bit about base life at Tuy Hoa and back at CCK. How much
contact did you have with home with your wife and your family?

DD: We communicated with tapes primarily. I’d usually get one a week maybe.
RV: You would get one a week and would you send one a week?
DD: Yes.
RV: Did you ever get to make any of those MARs phone calls?
DD: Yes on a couple of occasions but it was not very satisfactory.
RV: How about R&Rs were you able to take one?
DD: Yes I got a trip back home for I guess two weeks.
RV: Back to the United States?
DD: Yes.
RV: Wow! What was that like for you?
DD: I was delighted. Get out of Vietnam and Taiwan and get home to my wife and family for a short time.
RV: Back in Vietnam did you ever get to attend any of the USO shows?
DD: Yes. We had a Bob Hope troupe one time. My squadron at the time was flying it around in country in places for performing; I got to see one of those performances.
RV: Did you get to meet Bob Hope?
DD: Did I what?
RV: Did you meet Bob Hope yourself?
DD: No.
RV: What did you all do for entertainment there on base?
DD: Go to the movies.
RV: What kind of movies did you see?
DD: I don’t know. Whatever they were showing.
RV: Everything.
DD: Whatever it was.
RV: What about the officer’s clubs and things like that?
DD: Yes, we had officer’s clubs. That was primarily our officer’s mess where we ate.
RV: Was this at Tuy Hoa and at CCK?
DD: Yes.
RV: Did you see any excessive use of alcohol while you were there?
DD: No.

RV: Would you guys drink for relaxation or was there a particular group that would do that and others that would not?

DD: I don’t recall anybody having a particular problem. We might have a drink before dinner or something like that.

RV: How about drug use, did you witness any of that?

DD: Say again.

RV: Did you witness any drug use?

DD: I didn’t see any. I heard of some.

RV: Really what did you hear?

DD: I just heard that one of the loadmasters in another squadron was caught bringing drugs back into CCK from in country. He was disciplined. I don’t know exactly how.

RV: Were you able to keep up with news from the United States at all?

DD: Keep up with what?

RV: News. What was happening in the States?

DD: Yes. We had good radios on the airplanes. We could listen to Armed Forces network and all that kind of stuff.

RV: Did you have television access at all?

DD: No.

RV: Even in Taiwan you had no televisions?

DD: No.

RV: Looking at some of your entertainment things did you guys listen to music at all?

DD: Yes.

RV: What songs come to mind that remind you of your time in Vietnam?

DD: I Can’t Wait to Get Out of this Place.

RV: I can see why that would be popular (laughs).

DD: That was our theme song.

RV: Were you ever exposed to any wild animals or anything like that? I heard the rats in Vietnam were pretty bad. Did you see any of those?
DD: I don’t recall ever having problems with that.

RV: Did you experience or witness any race issues while you were there in Vietnam?

DD: No.

RV: So that was not a problem that you saw?

DD: No that I saw.

RV: What would you say was the bravest thing that you witnessed in Vietnam?

DD: The bravest?

RV: The bravest incident.

DD: I guess the one I was most involved in. I was the Airlift Commander at Khe Sahn for 14 days. When I went up there I took with me a combat control team with a load extraction system that was a cable that we stretched across the runway with water breaks on each end. We had to install that with big steel spikes that anchored those reels beside the runway. While we were out doing that we started getting sniper fire from off the base. That got to be pretty bad. We finally ceased trying to install the thing in the daytime and we went out at night.

RV: Did you receive sniper fire at night?

DD: No we didn’t receive any fire at night. We couldn’t see.

RV: You were actually on the ground at Khe Sahn for 14 days?

DD: Yes. I was the Airlift Commander.

RV: Can you describe what that was like? What was the mood on the base?

DD: The base was occupied by the Marines. Those guys were high energy, highly motivated. I guess it kind of rubs off on my guys. I had a Combat Control Team and I had an Aerial Port Team to off load the airplane. The Combat Control Team controlled the airdrops. We had a foxhole out in the middle of the drop zone. One of the combat controllers manned that foxhole during the drops and he could set off a smoke bomb to spot the center of the drop area. One day the guy who was out there, an incoming round landed pretty close to his foxhole and he stood up and another round went right through his arm.

RV: So he wasn’t killed, just wounded?
DD: Just wounded. Took him to the dispensary and he got his Purple Heart Medal.

RV: This was one of your men?

DD: Yes. Another one that was hit by shrapnel. Hit him in the elbow and he got a Purple Heart. I had another in my aeroport guys standing outside my bunker drinking juice out of a tin can.

RV: This is at Khe Sahn?

DD: A sniper bullet went right through that can and knocked it out of his mouth.

RV: Out of his mouth, wow!

DD: Drinking out of it and hit by a sniper. He wasn’t injured. He was surprised. He thought somebody knocked it out. When he saw that hole in the can he knew.

RV: Did you try to stay indoors most of the time?

DD: Yes. We were pretty well protected. On the flight line we had the ground controllers had all their radios in a jeep. They had revetted the jeep so we just stayed in there. I had a what we call connex box. It’s a Corrugated steel cargo container. It’s about 6 feet by 6 feet by 6 feet. That was revetted. I had communications in there.

That’s where I operated during the day. We had a reinforced concrete bunker up there that were built by the Air Force. We were using them for airborne air controllers. When the Marines came in the Air Force kept one of them. They had a control center and the third one was the medic. So we had an underground for all those airborne people. We had an underground bunker that was very secure. We were far enough from the perimeter. We had all those Marines between us and the perimeter so we were pretty well guarded. I never had to worry about somebody infiltrating.

RV: Right. Would you say that time at Khe Sahn was your most dangerous time in country?

DD: Yes, we had 1500 incoming rounds in one day.

RV: Wow! How would you rate the leadership that you had personally in Vietnam?

DD: Well, I guess I’d have to say it was mediocre. You had a very mature group of people. There were 19 lieutenant colonels. They don’t require a lot of discipline. But
the most senior of those Lieutenant Colonels was the Squadron Commander. I hardly
ever saw him. He had a job doing what he was doing. Wasn’t any problem.

RV: So because he was out of sight all the time you thought that was not so
good?

DD: He was never in country with us?

RV: Really?

DD: He was always at CCK.

RV: Why did he not go in country?

DD: I suppose he did some time. It seemed to me like he was always in his
office at CCK?

RV: What did you think of the overall military leadership in Vietnam?

DD: I thought it was good. We shared bases with the fighter guys and the
Marines. I thought it was really without a lot of conflicts. Everybody had his job to do
and did it.

RV: Did you know the exact date that you were going to leave CK and go back to
the States?

DD: I got extended twice.

RV: Was that by choice or did they do that to you?

DD: It was not by choice. It was supposed to be a one-year tour. I think I was
one day short of 14 month.

RV: Why did they extend you?

DD: They ran out of replacements. When they pulled guys like me back into the
cockpit, they were getting pretty close to the bottom of the barrel. Rather than sending
people back that had already been there a year. They’d stretch it out a little bit.

RV: Did you complain about this or did you just kind of go along with the show?

DD: I was not at all happy about it, but I didn’t complain too loudly. Of course
everybody else had to do the same thing.

RV: You wrote on your questionnaire that you flew a total of 458 missions in
South Vietnam. Was that 458 different flights or would you have multiple missions
during one day?
DD: I had multiple missions in one day. They refer to them as sorties. We’d fly from point A to point B. You had to be in a combat zone for it to count as a sortie.

RV: You had to be what, inside the combat zone?

DD: Yes.

RV: Did you fly missions elsewhere besides South Vietnam?

DD: Yes.

RV: Where did you go?

DD: Thailand. We had a little airline at Bangkok that we flew. We had four fighter bases over there. We’d fly two flights a day to them. One plane would go clockwise, the other would go counter clockwise. We had a requisitioned hotel in Bangkok, which was pretty neat duty. I think I did that twice.

RV: What kind of things did you fly over?

DD: Mostly passengers. Mail, fresh food and stuff like that.

RV: Did you ever get to go out and experience Thailand itself the country or were you regulated to the hotel?

DD: No we could move around like in the city of Bangkok. We were all over the place. They had a lot of interesting restaurants. There were several clubs. There was a lot of sight seeing things to see.

RV: Did you take advantage of those things?

DD: Yes.

RV: What would you say were the difference between the Vietnamese and the Thai people?

DD: I think the Thai people were better educated and a little more sophisticated than the Vietnamese.

RV: What gave you that impression, they interact better with Americans or was it just their culture?

DD: Just the culture. The difference between Saigon and Bangkok it was a marked difference between their quality of the city.

RV: What was your impression of Saigon, the city?

DD: Very favorable.

RV: Why so?
DD: Not Saigon. I was thinking of Bangkok.

RV: Tell me about Bangkok what was that like?

DD: You’d hardly know a war was going on there because there was no hazardous areas anywhere in the country. Saigon was kind of a ratty place. I didn’t spend much time there. In fact I don’t think I ever spent the night there. We’d fly over there and pick up a load and fly out.

RV: Let’s talk about when you left Taiwan and went back to the United States; did you fly a commercial flight back?

DD: Yes.

RV: What was that flight like, was it different than the flight over?

DD: No it was very much the same.

RV: Really? Subdued?

DD: Yes.

RV: Did you bring any souvenirs or anything home with you?

DD: Yes.

RV: What did you bring home?

DD: I brought some furniture that I bought in Taiwan. I bought a bunch of electronic stuff that I bought in the Navy exchange. I bought a couple weapons that I bought in the Navy exchange.

RV: What kind of weapons?

DD: .38 caliber pistol and .22 caliber pistol.

RV: Anything else?

DD: A bunch of odds and ends that I thought my wife might like to have.

RV: What kind of reception did you get back in the United States when you came back? Did you ever have any problems at the airports?

DD: No. I flew into Travis. I flew commercial to Los Angeles. I knew I was going to be assigned to Edwards Air Force Base when I got back. My wife and the children moved there before I came back.

RV: They were there to greet you?

DD: Sort of. They were waiting for me in Disneyland. So I took a cab to Disneyland and met them down there.
RV: How was that experience?
DD: It was wonderful.
RV: Did you have any trouble transitioning back to Stateside life versus being over in Asia?
DD: No I don’t think so.
RV: Did you discuss your Vietnam experience with other people? Did they ask you about it?
DD: I suppose so. There were so many people around. Most of my friends had done exactly the same thing I had. Got recalled and put back in the cockpit. Everybody had a few stories to tell.
RV: How about civilians did civilians ask about what you did?
DD: I don’t recall other than my relatives.
RV: You came back in 1969 is that correct?
DD: ’68.
RV: ’68. What was your impression of the anti-war movement that was going on?
DD: I was not favorably impressed. I thought it was an abomination for those people to be able to do that.
RV: What bothered you most about it?
DD: I just thought occasionally about all those dead guys that got hauled out of there. Kind of a reception people were getting coming back to the States.
RV: What did you think of the continuing war effort when you left? Did you keep up with what was happening over there?
DD: Yes, pretty much I guess.
RV: What was your opinion of it?
DD: By the time I got back, I thought that we’d already lost the war.
RV: Really? Why did you think that?
DD: I just didn’t see any way for us to win. The idea was we were going to train up the South Vietnamese so they could fend for themselves. I just didn’t see that happening.
RV: Really, why not?
DD: Just seemed to me that they never were that independent. They always tasked to a bunch of our guys.

RV: What did you think about the United States withdraw in 1973? Do you remember how you felt?

DD: Say again.

RV: In 1973, when the United States withdrew from South Vietnam how did you feel?

DD: I guess I was relieved to see them get out of there. I saw it was a losing situation. I thought we should have gotten out.

RV: How did you fell in April 1975, when South Vietnam fell as a country?

DD: I was saddened but not surprised. The South Vietnamese just weren’t as motivated as the North Vietnamese guys.

RV: What did you think of the media coverage of the war? Do you think it was portrayed accurately or thoroughly?

DD: Yes, I thought they did a pretty good job.

RV: Why did you think they did a good job?

DD: Because they allowed the reported to go right out there with the troops. The news reports I got from the news people that were over there I thought was a pretty accurate portrayal of what was going on.

RV: Looking back at your service today, how do you feel about your service in Vietnam?

DD: I have mixed emotions. I was unhappy about being there. I saw it as an upstanding cause. I enjoyed the hell out of the flying.

RV: Can you say that again? I didn’t understand you?

DD: I just enjoyed the flying.

RV: You enjoyed the flying, but you did not like being there?

DD: No.

RV: Ok, so it was good to get back in the cockpit and fly so much?

DD: Yes, that’s all I had to do. It was a fairly simple life, but it gave me an opportunity to become very proficient in say in that airplane and I got a lot of personal satisfaction out of that.
RV: Is there anything that you would change about your experience in Vietnam if you could?

DD: No, not really. I think I kind of had the best of what was there. Tuy Hoa was a fairly secure base. In some ways a little primitive.

RV: What do you think was the most significant thing that you learned while you were in Vietnam and in Taiwan?

DD: I suppose one of the things I learned was to not fight the system. To get in there and do your job as best you can. Try to protect your crew and survive. You know there was no reason to fight the system.

RV: How do you think the war has most affected your life?

DD: The main thing it did was it disrupted my career.

RV: Really? How so?

DD: Before I got into Vietnam I had a job at Vandenburg, which almost assured me another promotion. After being out of the loop for two years, those jobs were all filled when I was gone. I got an assignment up to Edward Air Force Base which I thought purely qualified an assignment that I would not have desired under any circumstances.

RV: What was your job there at Andrews?

DD: I was a Safety Director. I knew from past experience that no safety director in Systems Commander had ever been promoted to colonel. So I applied for retirement.

RV: You applied for retirement?

DD: Yes. You had to wait a year after you applied before you could retire. After I’d been there 30 days I put in my letter.

RV: You had this combat experience did you think that not help you at all in trying to get a promotion?

DD: No. I was just like I said one of 19 lieutenant colonels.

RV: What kind of lessons do you think the United States learned in Vietnam from the war if any?

DD: I hope we learned not to put ourselves into an unwinnable situation, which I think so far we’ve been entirely successful in doing that. That was just a no win situation.
almost from the start. I thought Lyndon Johnson was completely incompetent. I was unhappy about expending all that money and all those lives over there for nothing.

RV: You had witnessed a lot of commander and chiefs from Franklin Roosevelt all the way to Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon when you got out. I was going to ask you to compare Johnson to those other commander and chiefs. I think you just did.

DD: Incompetent liar.

RV: Did you think the politicians just didn’t simply understand what was happening over there or they didn’t try to understand what was happening there?

DD: I think maybe it was a two-headed problem. I don’t think they understood. I don’t think they were getting factual information from their field commanders. Westmoreland kept telling them, “Send me another 500,000 troops to win this thing”. I felt that it was just a bad situation.

RV: What do you think the United States could have done differently to win that war?

DD: I’m not sure we could have ever won that war. I think where we missed the boat was back in the early days when we went in and helped the French fight the North Vietnamese. When the French lost and left we could have adopted Ho Chi Minh, but we didn’t. We went with the Catholic from the South. So I think that set the situation by a couple of lessons. In my opinion it was a religious war.

RV: A religious war?

DD: Yes.

RV: Between what religions?

DD: The South Vietnamese were Catholics, the North Vietnamese were Buddhists.

RV: What do you think about Vietnam today? Do you think often of the country?

DD: I think it’s made a lot of progress. By this time I think it’s probably bigger then when we pulled out of there. They went through a lot of pain and punishing people and adapting.

RV: Would you ever want to go back to visit?

DD: No.
RV: Why not?

DD: I just can’t think of any place down there that I want to see again.

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

DD: No.

RV: Have you read any good books on the Vietnam War that you would recommend?

DD: Yes I have two right here in front of me.

RV: Really? What are they?

DD: This is a book called *Air Power and the Fight for Khe Sahn*. Its’ from the Office of Air Force History. It’s available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

RV: Why is that a good book do you think?

DD: It just gives a complete detailed analysis of the history of what transpired at Khe Sahn. How we got in there and what happened when we go into her and how we got out.

RV: What’s the other book?

DD: The other book is titled *Tactical Air Lift*.

RV: Tactical Air Lift?

DD: Yes.

RV: Is that a history of tactical airlift?

DD: It’s the United States Air Force in Southeast Asia by a fellow named Ray Bowers who was in my squadron.

RV: Are you in that book?

DD: Yes.

RV: So he does a pretty accurate rendition of what happened?

DD: Yes he was professional historian. A really well written book. It’s not just about Khe Sahn. It’s about the whole tactical airlift mission.

RV: How about movies about Vietnam? Do you ever go see the movies or have you seen movies about the war?

DD: I’ve got some documentary film like you see on TV. But that’s pretty much a record of what transpired.
RV: But you don’t go see the Hollywood movies?

DD: No.

RV: Is there a reason why you don’t?

DD: I guess, having been there I don’t guess there’s much for me to have to learn.

RV: Have you even been to the Wall in Washington D.C.?

DD: No I have not.

RV: Have you ever seen one of the traveling walls?

DD: No.

RV: Do you have a desire to see that?

DD: Well, maybe. I know a couple of people that are on it.

RV: So you might travel to Washington some time to see that or is it something that you’re not really that concerned with.

DD: I don’t think I’ll make a special trip to go. But if I were in Washington I would go back over there.

RV: If you had to talk to a group of young students today, what would you tell them about the Vietnam War?

DD: I don’t know. I guess I would tell them involve themselves more in the political process. Do what they could to make sure we had elected good leaders. That there country was doing what it should.

RV: What do you think about the situation today with the pending war with Iraq? Do you think there are any similarities with the Vietnam War?

DD: No, not in my opinion. I’m sure there are people that try to draw a parallel.

RV: Well, sir is there anything else that you’d like to talk about today or add to our conversation?

DD: I don’t know. I think I’ve told you about everything I know.

RV: Well, we certainly appreciate your time. We’ll go ahead and end the interview now with Mr. Don Davis. Thank you very much sir.