Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. I’m beginning an oral history interview with William F. Eads of the United States Air Force. I am in the Special Collections Room in the Special Collections Library at Texas Tech University and Mr. Eads is in Orlando, Florida. Good morning Mr. Eads.

William Eads: Good morning.

LC: First of all can we start with a little bit of biographical information? Can you tell me where you were born and when?

WE: I was born 19th September ’43 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

LC: You’re parents, can you tell me a little bit about them?

WE: Well I was raised by my stepfather [and mother], but I consider him my real dad and my mom. He was a World War II vet and was at Pearl Harbor when it got hit. My mother, during World War II she worked in an engine plant in Cincinnati, the Wright Engine Plant in Cincinnati, Ohio.

LC: Your step dad, when did he marry your mom? How old were you?

WE: Four years old.

LC: He was a veteran of what branch of the service?

WE: United States Navy.

LC: Had he volunteered for the Navy?

WE: Yes he did.
LC: Was he assigned to a particular ship at the time of Pearl Harbor?
WE: No, as far as I know he was a Yeoman and he was assigned to shore duty.
LC: Did he ever tell you anything about his experiences on Pearl Harbor or soon
there after?
WE: Yes. Some of the things that come to my mind, like many other people that
have been through an awful thing like that, he never has spoke a lot about it, but on a
couple occasions he has talked about it. Evidently he was, as I say, a Yeoman and he got
word earlier than a lot of people that the place was under attack. The people who were
on shore. He had a brother who was a couple days out of Pearl on a ship; I don’t know
which one it was. He had a brother that was stationed there with him. He left his Yeoman
position and went over to tell his brother who was in the chow hall that the place was
under attack. The brother said, “Oh you’re kidding us.” About that time one of the zeros
strafed the chow hall and they dove under a table and that’s where they stayed for the
duration of the attack. Wasn’t much else they could do, [him being] a Yeoman is an
admin type person.
LC: What was his name, your dad?
WE: Ivan was his first name.
LC: Was his last name Eads or do you have your…?
WE: Yes.
LC: His last name is Eads?
WE: Yes.
LC: His subsequent service in the Navy during World War II, do you know much
about that?
WE: Not a whole lot. I know that he lost his mom and had to come back to the
States and then he went to Washington D.C. and I think he worked in the Office of Chief
of Naval Operations up there. I don’t know if Forrestall was there at the time or who it
was, but he got to spend a little time up in Washington D.C. One of the things he told me,
reflecting back on, another thing he told me about that was after the attack he said, well a
couple of things I found interesting was one of the things was they gathered up all of their
white uniforms and they boiled them and they used them for bandages to bandage the
injured and wounded people. Another thing that I thought was interesting, he said, of
course they were gun shy after that, he said they put people up on buildings and different
positions with the anti-aircraft guns and stuff like that and he said, “If you came in at
night and you didn’t have any radios or anything and you were in a airplane, you were in
a lot of trouble because chances are you’re going to get shot out of the sky.” That was
two side stories, but like I say the only time I ever heard him talk about it is with that
brother he was stationed with over there and just a couple other times.

LC: What was his brother’s service like; do you know anything about that?
WE: Not at all. I know there were three brothers in the Navy at the same time and
one’s name was Carlton, the other’s name was Kenneth and I really don’t know which
one was on shore with him and which one was out at sea.

LC: They all made it back from the war?
WE: Yes.

LC: Let’s talk about your mom for a second. Had she had any kind of career or
work outside the home before the war?
WE: She was a graduate of University of Cincinnati. My understanding she was a
concert pianist. I think she had a degree in music and she was a concert pianist with the
University. Then she worked for Wright Engines making aircraft engines and of course
the day the war was over they shut the plant down. I don’t know what she did between
then and the time she married my dad. Then she became a housewife and that’s where
she stayed. She raised my three other brothers and a sisters so there is five siblings.

LC: Was that a blended family or are your brother and sisters all the product of
the marriage between the two…?
WE: I’m the only one…

LC: So you’re the oldest?
WE: I’m the oldest.

LC: And you have what, four did you say, brothers and sisters?
WE: Yeah I got a sister and a set of twin brothers and another brother.

LC: Did your brothers have any military experience in their careers?
WE: No, they didn’t. One of them had high lottery number because they are
younger than me and they were under the lottery. The twins had low lottery number
however both of them were disqualified for high blood pressure at what they called the
AFEES (Armed Forces Examining and Entrance Station) back then.

LC: Where did you go to school Bill, when you were say, in high school?
WE: I went to school at Little Miami High School in Morrow, Ohio.
LC: How far is that from Cincinnati?
WE: About 29 miles.
LC: What was high school like for you? Were you a good student?
WE: I was a mischievous student. I didn’t reach up to the bar. From what I
understand I tested pretty good IQ wise but really didn’t apply myself like I should of.
Wasn’t a bad kid but I was a mischievous kid and those courses that I enjoyed, I excelled
at and those course that I didn’t…the courses that I excelled at, they kept me afloat.
LC: So your motivation varied substantially by course?
WE: By course. What I enjoyed to do I did well.
LC: What kinds of things did you like and what didn’t you like?
WE: I was never strong in high math. I liked reading. I liked spelling. I liked the
shops, back then they had some vocational courses in the school, I liked them. Liked
geography. Was not much on world history, not that I couldn’t come up to the challenge;
it was just boring to me. I liked science, I enjoyed science as far as looking at science and
what takes place in science. I wasn’t big on getting into the chemistry side of it with
formulas and all that stuff.
LC: You said you took some shop classes. What kinds of things did you take
machine shop or what?
WE: Machine shop, auto maintenance, wood shop, those type things, and
mechanical drawing.
LC: And those were pretty fun for you?
WE: Yes.
LC: Were they easy for you to?
WE: Yes I enjoyed them very much. And they were easy.
LC: What about sports, did you play at all?
WE: Yes, I was never a star. My brothers were just naturally talented; I used to
say well I had to work hard to sit the bench. I played a little basketball, played a little
baseball. Had a chance at football but just decided against it, but I did play a little
baseball and a little basketball.

LC: Did you have a favorite between those two?
WE: Not really, I enjoyed both of them.

LC: Did you like team sports better than kind of singular pursuits?
WE: Probably so because there wasn’t a lot available, well I guess I could of run
track or something like that but probably enjoyed the interface with the other people. I’m
a people person.

LC: Got it. Were you thinking about going to college as you came to the end of
your high school days?
WE: Yes, I was thinking about it, I was not really blue out of the saddle with it
but my parents, especially my mom, was really desirous that I go to school. I did, I went
to school for a year at Olivet Nazarene College in Kankakee, Illinois. I had enough of a
GPA when I got out of high school and good enough grades to get in but I kind of
twiddled it away if you know what I mean. I didn’t really apply myself. I later in life got
my college degree.

LC: Where did you go later on?
WE: To get my degree?
LC: Yes.
WE: Park College. They work very close with the services to make sure that you
can get all your courses collected and then get a degree from them. I got a BA in
Management. Where people get BS in Management, I got a BA.

LC: The choice of going over to Olivet, how did that come about?
WE: We were very involved…my parents were involved so therefore I was.
Involved in the Nazarene Church. My dad, after I left, in fact, he became a minister. With
religious background they had a desire that I go to a religious based college.

LC: So you went out there for a year did you say?
WE: Yes, a little over a year I stayed there.

LC: How did that go?
WE: I was an average student, probably could’ve again excelled more if I wanted
to apply myself but I was enjoying the party life. Of course, at that time, party life and
Olivet didn’t necessarily go together. Olivet was a church based school. We had our ups and downs with that a little bit.

LC: Did you go kind of go into town to find social friends and stuff?
WE: Yes because the college, they just had some tight rules and stuff.

LC: Do you remember some of those rules?
WE: Well you were expected to be at chapel at, I think, it was ten o’clock every morning and that was one thing. It had a 15-minute chapel that you were required to go to. Of course there was no tobacco or alcohol allowed on the campus. Very strict on bed checks, very strict on what was on limits, off limits, that type stuff.

LC: Did they have like a curfew?
WE: Yes.

LC: And you had to live in the dorm I take it.
WE: Yes.

LC: What were you studying, do you remember that year what classes were you taking and what were you thinking about?
WE: Just general freshman type things. Of course they would, I don’t know whether it was in lieu of history or what, but they cranked Old Testament, New Testament, religious course in there. That wasn’t bad, that was kind of interesting.

LC: What year was this that you enrolled there, do you remember?
WE: ’61.

LC: The fall of 1961?
WE: Yes.

LC: So you had graduated from high school…?
WE: In ’61.

LC: Were your experience in college of kind of not getting into an academic groove there part of your thinking about moving to a military career?
WE: Big time. I always looked up to an uncle of mine who was in the Air Force. He was kind of a neat guy, a party type guy, always looked good in his uniform and stuff like that. I kind of looked to him as kind of a mentor.

LC: Was that your mom’s brother?
WE: No, it was my father’s brother. My dad had some younger brothers.
LC: What was the name of the Air Force uncle that you liked particularly?
WE: Avery, we called him Dave, but his first name was Avery.
LC: And what was his last name?
WE: Eads.
LC: What did he do in the Air Force?
WE: He was a boom operator.
LC: What does that mean?
WE: A boom operator on tankers in the Air Force and in-flight refueler.
LC: Where had he been stationed, do you know?
WE: All over. He was one of those guys, he was a good looking guy, always had a girlfriend or a wife or two. (Laughter) I know he was in Plattsburgh I think towards the end of his career, Plattsburgh Air Force Base.
LC: That life looked pretty good?
WE: Yeah I mean it was intriguing life. It kind of puts you in mind of an Indiana Jones type guy; you know what I mean?
LC: Sure. I presume you went to talk to a recruiter. At what point did you decide to actually take the step and go and talk to somebody?
WE: I started my sophomore year at college, or my second year; I was probably not a sophomore yet but started my second year of college and said, “I’m wasting my money, my parent’s money and everything else, I’m going to go and talk to a recruiter.” Went to talk to him in September and I shipped the 3rd of October of 1962.
LC: Now where was the recruiter that you went to see, do you remember?
WE: In Kankakee, Illinois.
LC: Do you remember that encounter with that recruiter?
WE: Somewhat, I remember his name. His name was Noah Zorbrest. I liked what he had to say; he was the no nonsence type of guy. He didn’t lie, he told me the way it was going to be, of course he didn’t tell me that yes I would be out on a golf course, but he didn’t tell me that I would be policing up the golf course and not playing golf on the golf course.
LC: So he’d sort of shade things maybe a little?
WE: Well you know, I was a recruiter for five and a half years and you’re told to
tell the truth. You don’t have to answer questions they don’t ask.
LC: You don’t have to be brutally explicit, especially if they don’t know what it
is.
WE: You don’t fib but you steer away from the not so good parts.
LC: Bill, what was it in what he told you that made you think, “Yes I absolutely
need to leave college and do this.”
WE: I don’t know whether he really said a whole…I think in my mind I was
following my destiny. I think I had my mind made up when I walked in there.
LC: Did your parents have any idea what you were thinking?
WE: No, and that wasn’t good.
LC: That didn’t go down to well, huh?
WE: No, I called them from up in Kankakee, they were living out in Morrow at
the time, and I told them I said, “I got some news, I’m going in the Air Force tomorrow,”
I think it was. Of course they were devastated by it I’m sure but I was 300 miles from
them and there wasn’t a whole lot they could do about it. I think they just resigned
themselves to the fact that was what was going to happen.
LC: Did you initially speak to your dad or to your mom?
WE: Mom.
LC: Was she emotionally upset or was she fearful, how would you describe her
reaction? Was she just disappointed?
WE: I would say disappointment. She didn’t holler or raise cane or anything like
that. It was more of a one-way conversation. I guess they just accepted the fact that I had
it in my mind that’s what I wanted to do and they knew how I felt about my uncle and the
service and stuff anyway.
LC: Were you, at this time, paying much attention to international politics?
WE: I knew that things were uneasy in certain areas of the country like Cuba and
stuff like that. I guess my mind wasn’t really on Vietnam at the time. I’m sure, as I reflect
back on it; I knew that there was something cooking down in Cuba because it wasn’t
shortly there after of course that the Cuban thing jumped up. I’ll elaborate more on that
when we talk about my basic training and stuff.
LC: Did you have an opinion about President Kennedy before you went into the military?

WE: I only remember that I thought he was an ok guy. I know that there was some political issues, of course us being strict Protestants, I know my dad was concerned about a Catholic getting into the White House, but I don’t remember whether that had an effect on me or not.

LC: Did your dad ever talk about that with you or did you hear him speaking…?

WE: Just people that were religious back then, they were way to the right, you know what I mean? More black and white than it is today. After he studied theology and stuff like that he got a lot more open minded in stuff like that but, [at that point] it wouldn’t be good to have a Catholic in the White House I can tell you that.

LC: At this point had your father become an ordained minister yet?

WE: No. He did that after I left home.

LC: What was he doing for a living at this point?

WE: He was working in one of the plants in downtown Cincinnati; I don’t know whether it was Ford or General Electric at that time.

LC: And your mom was busy raising all your younger brothers and sisters. Did she ever say to you something that made you think she was concerned that your having gone into the military might draw your younger brothers, particularly, to that too?

WE: No, not at all. They seemed to let us follow our own league.

LC: That’s pretty good. Let’s talk about getting to basic. Where did you actually muster in, where was your…?

WE: Chicago.

LC: Ok, Chicago. Is that where you did your basic?

WE: No ma’m I did my basic in San Antonio.

LC: What was it like when you arrived at Chicago at I suppose the Air Force Depot there?

WE: Well you go to AFEES, which is the Armed Force’s Examination and Entrance Station. Now it’s called MEPC (Military Entrance Processing Command) but anyway…

LC: Do you remember that?
WE: I remember going through and I had this buddy that was suppose to go with me and he disqualified, I passed and then we got on an airplane and went to San Antonio.

LC: That happened pretty quickly, getting on the plane?
WE: Yeah it was you know, just normal one day processing.

LC: You arrived at San Antonio at Lackland?
WE: Lackland, it was late in the evening.

LC: Can you describe your first couple of days there, what happened to you?
WE: Well I can remember getting to bed late. The next thing I know was the TI (Training Instructor) raising cane in the barracks it must have about 3:30 in the morning. I kind of come out of my deep sleep and said, “Oh my gosh, what have I done?” (Laughter) That was pretty fast and furious. I do remember one twinge of homesickness. I remember one night probably about three days into it we had these lone single light bulbs dangling from the ceiling, bare light bulbs and I remember staring at that light bulb saying, “Gee whiz,” again thinking, “Have I really made the right decision?” And then I tried to actually at one point thought I might try to hang it up. I had an operation on my back, minor operation on my back when I was a senior in high school and it was bothering me a little bit so I went to the doctor with a sick call. I told the doctor it was bothering me and he kind of took a look at it and he said, “Aww, there is nothing wrong with you, get back to your unit.” Probably one of the best decisions that doctor did because he sent me back and I decided that hey we were going to follow through with this mission that we had set out upon. After that I never looked back. I was always thinking forward.

LC: Bill, how long had you signed up for?
WE: Four years.

LC: When you had that kind of moment where you thought well maybe my back is bad and I should see a doctor, did you think that might be a way to kind of get out from under before you…?
WE: Yeah, it was just normal thing everybody thinks, well a large percentage of people think of ways to get out. You have guys intentionally wetting the bed; you had guys doing different things back then to get out.
LC: Do you remember some of those other things; did you ever know of anybody who was successful?

WE: Yeah the guy that wet the bed.

LC: He got out?

WE: Yeah, sure did. I remember that. He told the guy that was in the bunk below him, he said, “You better look out tonight, I’m going to wet the bed.” He did. They put him out. Yeah, people got out for different reasons, some of them were self-imposed.

LC: That first week or so, how did you do with the sudden imposition of military discipline?

WE: It’s not a problem. I didn’t fight it. In fact I kind of enjoyed being in a structured environment, which sounds complete inverse of what it was like in high school. I liked it because it was meaty, it was meaningful, and it was something to focus on. I mean they certainly didn’t give you too much of a chance to let your mind wander.

LC: So you didn’t get a lot of sleep for example.

WE: I got adequate sleep; the Air Force is not quite as hard over on some of that stuff as the Army is I don’t think. I mean just from what I’ve heard. We had our fire checks in the middle of the night. We had different things like that. We got into a routine.

LC: Can you describe a basic outline of a general day there during basic?

WE: I just remember getting up early, getting up early, marching to chow, marching to chow, classes, and PT (Physical Training) and just kind of was so fast and furious it kind of all ran together. You always had some place to go. I do remember a couple of incidences that you have to laugh at when you’re going through it. One of which, God bless his heart, but we had this little kid named Peaches from Georgia and he was in our unit and we called him Peaches. Peaches had never shaved before and Peaches come out the first morning after we all had to shave and after the TI made us all shave and everything and poor little guy, he was bleeding like a stuck hog where he had cut himself with the razor and everything. I remember the TI sending him back to get cleaned up and kind of hitting on him about that. I think Peaches’ destiny was already picked at that time because then we went to the clothing issue. Went to clothing issue and we got our fatigues and the TI, his name was Earnest Stobbs, I never will forget him. He said, “Ok,” he used to call us Hoods. He called the guys from Chicago, Chicago Hoods. And
he called us dip shits too, if I may say that. That’s what he called us. He said, “You dip
shits, you got ten minutes to get into that barracks and get to your first pair of fatigues
hemmed and get back out. So we all run in there with our little sewing kits and that and
we hemmed our pants. So we’re back out in formation and ole Stobbs is walking down
the line, ole Peaches he was short anyway so he was in the front of the line. He says,
“What in the hell are you doing? Peaches get up here.” Peaches gets up on the damn
concrete up above us there and Stobbs says, “What in the hell are you thinking?” Here we
look down at Peaches’ hem and everybody had hemmed their pants under, on the inside
of the pants. Peaches had these cuffs that were about a foot and a half long [on the
outside of his pants]. So he says, “You get over there and you stand in that dumpster.” So
he sent Peaches over, made him get in the dumpster. About two days later Peaches was
back in Georgia, just didn’t cut it. (Laughter) But I never will forget that as long as I live.
One kid out of 50 had his cuffs on the wrong side.

LC: Maybe he’s really not cut out for what the Air Force needs.
WE: Then I remember, if I may, I remember where I was when Kennedy got on
the TV and gave Castro the ultimatum. That was a heck of an evening because we were
standing in the laundry line to pick up our laundry, and Kennedy was on television giving
Castro the ultimatum. That was a significant time, one of those significant moments in
you life.

LC: What was the feeling like there listening to that?
WE: Again I think I made the right decision but this might not be pretty, you
know what I mean. See Vietnam wasn’t even, we weren’t even thinking about it.
Although it was chugging along over there in it’s infant stages so to speak.

LC: But your focus at that time and everyone’s focus was Cuba.

WE: Yes.

LC: Did you hear any chatter about the possibility of deploying down there of US
troops becoming involved? Did you hear anything like that?
WE: Oh yeah. There was no doubt about it; we were on alert. Of course us still
being in basic training, there was talk about accelerating us and stuff. The state of Florida
was filling up with troops and airplanes and everything.
LC: Did you notice or were you aware of units or officers at Lackland who were being moved to Florida?
WE: No, I didn’t really. We were so far down; basic training is down the food chain at that time that we were just following instructions from our TIs.

LC: What did you hear about the possibility of your own training getting accelerated?
WE: Just that was one of the many, many rumors that they may accelerate us and put us into a skirmish if it took off. Just general chitchat.

LC: When you say it was a real sort of important moment, do you mean that in terms of how you felt reassessing your own position within the United States Military?
WE: No, no I was willing to stay and be there for the mission. It was just a very, to all of us standing in that line, it was just a very sobering moment, realizing that, “Hey this is real.”

LC: Do you remember anything more about the impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis on the base itself?
WE: Of course we didn’t get to go downtown but one time anyway but there was restraint. I don’t remember anything being, you know a basic training base is a basic training base so I don’t remember anything being accelerated or anything. We just stayed right on schedule; orders came in for technical school and stuff like that on a normal thing.

LC: Before we go to your advanced training, can we talk for a second about your weapons training there at basic? What did you train on?
WE: Just the rifle, M-1 I guess it was, just a rifle. We went through gas training and stuff like that; just a rifle is all we fired.

LC: How did you do with that training?
WE: I did ok. I qualified.

LC: Do you remember that gas training? What was that like?
WE: Oh just they run you in there and you pulled your mask off and course they run you through there dry first and showed you how to do it and then they run you through there with tear gas in there. Of course you got the effects of the tear gas. It was very uncomfortable but it was just part of the training.
LC: Did you think about it that way at the time? Did you think, “Well this is just something I have to be prepared for? This is something I got to do.”
WE: Right.
LC: Did you know of other guys who were kind of more struggling more with it, not necessarily physically but more, “Why are we doing this or I don’t want to do this,” that kind of thing?
WE: No it seemed to be the consensus. By that time they had weeded out all the ne’er-do-wells that didn’t want to go forward by that time so everybody was moving in a forward direction.
LC: So by now the group was getting pretty consolidated?
WE: Yeah, very gelled, very cohesive. Just was working according to plan, the way the Air Force had planned it to work.
LC: Were you giving much thought at this point to the kind of MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) you would like to have?
WE: Oh sure. When we left for basic training of course I picked, back then it wasn’t as selective as it is now, I picked the mechanical aptitude area because that tied in with my strengths. I scored well in it I scored well on the general knowledge portion of the test so I went to basic training and was put into the aircraft maintenance field.
LC: When your orders for advanced training came in, do you remember that day?
WE: Not really. More so the day of advanced training when I got my assignment to Japan but we’ll talk about that in a little bit.
LC: As you move towards the end of basic, you at some stage there did get your orders for advanced. Where were you going?
WE: Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.
LC: When you graduated from basic, how many guys were going in the same direction you were?
WE: When I graduated from basic?
LC: Yeah.
WE: There was about 10 or 11 of us.
LC: Did you guys go kind of as a group then onto Sheppard?
WE: We knew each other from basic and we kind of hung together at tech school.
LC: Was graduation from basic a big deal or not?
WE: Yeah it was a pretty nice achievement. I can’t remember a whole lot about it anymore but it was a good feeling. It was not as long as what Army training and stuff like that is. We felt we had made our contribution. So it was a pretty neat feeling.

LC: Did you communicate with your parents during basic very much?
WE: Oh yeah, I wrote letters home. They wrote letters to me. Mom was more flexible than dad was. I kind of messed my dad up a little bit because I left a car with that buddy that I told you about that didn’t go into the Air Force. He went back and he drove my car, which I gave him permission to do and he ended up getting picked up because he didn’t have…the registration was in mine and my dad’s name and of course he didn’t match up to that so they ended up calling my father and my father had to take a train to Illinois and get the car and bring it back home. The car broke down on the way back so that added insult to injury. He wasn’t real happy about that but they fell in step and I would have to say by that time they were very supportive of me and what I was trying to accomplish, again, good parents.

LC: Yes, exactly, and it makes a big difference. Can you describe your arrivals at Sheppard, you and the 10 or so guys from your basic unit?
WE: Well I remember we went up by bus and I remember processing into the squadron and being assigned to the dormitory. We sat around for a while before PAT status, Personnel Waiting Training status, and of course we got our share of having to work in the…pull KP (Kitchen Police) and do different jobs around until our class dates started. Of course it was aircraft maintenance so I was happy about that.

LC: So did the idea that you were actually going to get into aircraft maintenance kind of console you while you had to do KP?
WE: Oh sure. Everybody that came there, they paid their dues by doing that you know. I feel that the military, I still do, I think they are pretty good about spreading the wealth, both the good things and the bad things.

LC: And everybody gets a turn.
WE: That’s right.
LC: Tell me about advanced training. What was it like, was it mostly bookwork or was it out in the shop or how did it go down?
WE: Well we were in a situation there being aircraft maintenance where your instructor would teach you and then he would assist you in doing the task and then he would do it by yourself and he would evaluate you. So we would be in the classroom and then we would go out into the hanger and do our practicals. Had mock ups in the classroom too.

LC: So you had quite a bit of hands on?
WE: Yes.
LC: Did that make you feel good; did you actually feel like you were…?
WE: Oh sure. That was me, my forte.
LC: Was hands on?
WE: Right.
LC: What engines or parts were you working with?
WE: Aircraft general. I was responsible for the whole aircraft.
LC: The whole aircraft?
WE: Right.
LC: And what aircraft was it?
WE: Well we trained on, in the training thing; we trained on C-97, T-28s, anything and everything. I was RECIP (Reciprocating), I wasn’t jet.
LC: What’s RECIP?
WE: You know piston driven aircraft, propeller driven, piston driven aircraft. Internal combustion type engine versus a jet.
LC: Were you happy enough to be working, basically on the prop planes?
WE: Oh sure, yeah, didn’t bother me none.
LC: What about the other guys from your basic unit, did they stay with you and working in the same kind of training cohort or did they go off, some of them, and do jets or other things?
WE: I can remember, you know it’s kind of foggy now, which ones were at basic training with me and which ones stayed with me. As time went on at tech school, there was a circle of us that got together and knew each other that ended up going to our first assignment, which was Yokota Air Base, Japan together. We’ll talk about that later I guess. I don’t know it’s kind of foggy now but who left basic with me and as I
transitioned into new friendships, out of that group who went on to Japan with me. I remember more who went to Japan with me, if that makes sense.

LC: Yeah it does. Were you making friends easily?

WE: Oh yeah. I was a little bit short tempered and could get ticked off real quick but overall I could get along with people.

LC: Do you remember your instructors there at Sheppard?

WE: I don’t remember his name but I remember we used to have a situation where we would go to school at six o’clock in the morning. The school was broken into three shifts: A shift, B shift, and C shift. I was on A shift. So we would go from six to noon and then we would come back and we would do detail and whatever we had to do for the rest of the day and evening. Part of the details was you had to finish your last half of basic training and I can remember that, I can see that instructor in my mind; I can’t remember his name. As far as the instructors down at the hanger, there was a couple of civilians. I don’t remember their names.

LC: Do you remember much about their enthusiasm for what they were trying to teach you to do? Were they good instructors?

WE: Yes, very much so. Very interesting, very compassionate to you being new, and very interested in making sure that you got through the course.

LC: You said that you had to finish kind of the second half of basic. What does that mean?

WE: You continued some of your basic training at tech school. They kind of split it up. You graduated from basic training at Lackland but then you had more of that that they wanted to give you up at tech school so you would go out and you would have drill training in the afternoon and you would have some classroom work and stuff like that, just to complete the package.

LC: Did you feel the training that you were getting was enough to kind of get you into the career of aircraft maintenance? Did you really feel like you were starting a career?

WE: Oh sure. Sure, yeah.

LC: How long was your advanced training session?
WE: I got there in November and I think we graduated in March. I want to say 11, 12 weeks maybe, something like that.

LC: So that would be March 1963?

WE: Yes.

LC: At what point did you receive your first assignment orders?

WE: Probably around January of ’63, somewhere in there.

LC: Can you describe that day?

WE: Oh that was great. I remember we were out in formation and of course I had put in for Europe. I had put in for overseas because again like I said following in the footsteps of my uncle I wanted to get out and see the world. I’d been a little ole country boy kind of tied into that Cincinnati area there, rural Cincinnati at that. I wanted to get out and I was really looking forward to doing that. I had put in for Europe because in my mind since I was of German descent and I wanted to go and take a look at that area over there. As it worked out I went the opposite direction to Japan but it was a great time. They were passing out orders, we were in formation, they were naming off who was going where and stuff like that. It was great.

LC: When you heard Japan what did you think?

WE: Well I said, “That’s different. That’s not where I wanted to go but hey it’s an adventure.”

LC: Do you remember your graduation from advanced?

WE: Not very well. I remember more so leaving the base late at night. A buddy of mine, Bill Massock and I, who was going to go into Japan with me, him and I hitchhiked. Everybody else caught the bus but we said we were going to hitch hike. We were adventurers you know. We hitch hiked from San Antonio to St. Louis and then we got on buses and he got off in southern Illinois there somewhere and I got off in Cincinnati, took 30 days leave and then I hooked up with him back in Chicago. We took a bus back across from Chicago; we wanted to see the United States, back across…from Chicago to San Francisco and almost missed our flight.

LC: That’s a long bus trip.

WE: Yeah, but we were young and crazy so it didn’t bother us none.

LC: Where was Bill Massock from?
WE: Bill Massock was from Illinois. I am wanting to say Champaign, around Champaign, Illinois.

LC: Ok, so somewhere down south.

WE: And we still talk with each other believe it or not after all these years.

LC: Really? He was going to be assigned to the same unit, in Yokota?

WE: Yes.

LC: Do you remember what you guys talked about on that bus trip?

WE: Go ahead and say again.

LC: Do you remember what you talked about on that long bus trip out to the West Coast?

WE: Just what it was going to be like going to Japan, who we were going to hook up with, just the excitement of it all.

LC: It was going to be a big adventure.

WE: Oh my goodness, yes. See it wasn’t all shoved at you back then like it is now, through media and stuff like that.

LC: Yeah, you probably had very little idea of what Japan would be like. Did you have any?

WE: And my father wasn’t real happy with the Japanese over at Pearl Harbor, you know.

LC: Yeah what did he tell you during that leave? Did he have much to say about your posting?

WE: No, not really. Just be careful and I don’t think he would have been too happy if I’d have brought a Japanese wife back. Many did and I dated a few over there and had a good time but he would’ve probably [not been happy for me to marry], even though he was a Christian person, there were just some things that are hard to change.

LC: Sure, well he had a traumatic experience. Did he have feelings in general about the United States relationship with Japan after the war that he ever told you about or that influenced your thinking about Japan at all?

WE: As good a Christian man as he was, it was hard for him to accept the fact that we had….he didn’t say a whole lot about it but I just got the feeling that he, you
know they had really...he felt they had done us a wrong that he was having trouble
getting over.

LC: Sure. What about your mom? What was her reaction to the idea of you going
to Japan?

WE: Not much, just behave myself. That was a lost cause, I’ll tell you that.
(Laughter) Just be careful and more or less just that kind of stuff.

LC: By this time they were both pretty much on board with your career decision.

WE: Oh sure.

LC: What else did you do during that leave time, that month that you had off? Do
you remember? Was there anything interesting or exciting that you did?

WE: Oh I ran around with some of my high school friends. We all got together
and partied a little bit. They looked at me as being kind of neat and doing something
different. Then I went up to Illinois and I hooked up with that guy I told you about
earlier, Roger Lundy was his name. Kind of chewed his butt about handling the car
situation, but we were buddies so we run around together for a little bit. Of course I’ve
never seen him after that but then I went on and hooked up with Bill Massock, the guy I
went to the coast with. I just remember socializing a whole lot, hanging out you know.

LC: And kind of looking forward to what it was you were going to be doing.

WE: Right, yeah.

LC: When you arrived in San Francisco what happened?

WE: Well we got there, we almost missed our flight but we did get there in time
enough where we didn’t get our butts chewed too bad. We got on, back then it was
Military Air Transport Service, MATS, and we flew backwards in a C-118 to Hawaii,
then to Wake Island and then to Yokota.

LC: Did you stay on board the MATS aircraft the whole time or were you able to
get off at those stops?

WE: We were able to get off; I think we also hooked up with a couple other
friends there. I think Jack Dawson and somebody else. We went down; when we got to
Hickam we went downtown for a couple hours.

LC: What was it like being in Hawaii?
WE: Well it was all together different to me. It was new adventure. I remember being down there on bar row, just kind of going around and checking the bars out and stuff, trying to behave myself because I didn’t want to miss that flight.

LC: Was there anything spooky about being at Hickam field for you?
WE: No, I didn’t even think about that.
LC: Oh is that right.
WE: Or as I reflect back now, I didn’t even think about that. It may have run through my mind but I can’t reflect now.

LC: When you arrived at Japan what were some of your first impressions when you got off the plane?
WE: I remember it being very drab. I remember the landing and looking at the rooftops. As I remember it was kind of hazy out, stuff like that.
LC: And you arrived at Yokota I assume.
WE: At Tachikawa.
LC: Oh really, ok.
WE: Because Tachikawa and Yokota were very close but Tachikawa at that time was the receiving base for those going into Japan.
LC: What happened to you at Tachikawa, did you receive new uniforms…?
WE: Somebody welcomed us and put us on a bus and took us over to Yokota.
LC: How did you process in? Was there a particular procedure?
WE: Well we happened to come in on a Friday, as I remember it. There wasn’t a whole lot of processing at Tachi. I think our end assignment was Yokota so they put us on a bus and took us over to Yokota. Somebody met us there and all I remember is, “Ok you guys aren’t allowed to go downtown.” They assigned us the dormitory, and they said, “You guys aren’t allowed to go downtown until you get at pass and you’ll get a pass Monday.” That was the wrong thing to say to us of course. So we, you know, the adventurers that we were, we went on downtown that evening. We didn’t get into trouble of anything. We walked downtown and checked out the sights and the bars and just had a real good time together. Got to grow up real quick that night.

LC: Once kind of business started, which was probably then Monday, what were you told to do? What were the first things that you were assigned to?
WE: Well again we had to pay our dues and they didn’t assign us to aircraft right away or to jobs right away so this Chief…Newman, I remember his name, Chief Newman, he assigned us to put some tile down on the floor, I remember that. Then they ran out of tile for us to put down so he decided that we needed to sand the picture frames and refinish the picture frame, which again it’s part of paying your dues so it didn’t bother us that much. I think we were waiting for clearances for line badges or something like that.

LC: Once those clearances came through, what did you start doing? What was your job?

WE: I was very, very fortunate because I was assigned to an airplane, KB-50, which was an in-flight refueler, a B-29 looking plane but a little bit bigger version of a B-29. It was a B-50 and then they modified it into a KB-50, which was designated as a tanker bomber. Instead of bombs in the bomb bay there were fuel tanks. I was assigned to a Crew Chief by the name of Bill Decker. Bill Decker took me out there and Bill Decker stands all of about 5 foot tall, I still communicate with him. He stands all about 5 foot tall, 5’1. He said, “Young man,” he says, “You see that aircraft there?” I said, “Yes sir.” He said, “Well that’s my aircraft.” He said, “Do you see that oil that’s dripping off that engine?” I said, “Yes sir.” He said, “That’s your oil. Would you please get your oil off my aircraft?” But we developed a real good friendship and I made E-9 in the Air Force, and I wouldn’t have done that if it hadn’t been for Bill Decker and a few other people in my career. Bill really established the groundwork for me to be successful.

LC: And that was through his attention to your training and improvement?

WE: Yes, very much so.

LC: Did he do that with everybody or do you think he kind of picked you up or…

WE: Well I was his assistant; I was his Assistant Crew Chief. He was kind of my mentor and I trained under him. The other guys, we are going to reunion in fact in Las Vegas where about five or six of us are going to get together there in March and all of those guys that meet with him, he had a direct impact on their lives.

LC: Is Bill still around?

WE: Yes.

LC: Is he going to be there in Las Vegas?
WE: Yes.

LC: Oh, that great! Where is Bill from, what was his home state?

WE: From south of Chicago and he lives out now in Fairfield, California near Travis.

LC: You started off then with a pretty good relationship with the person you were reporting to?

WE: Oh wonderful.

LC: That’s great. Tell me about your daily routine as it kind of emerged there at Yokota.

WE: Well I show up to work, it was one of those type jobs where you work hard, party hard. You worked until the aircraft was in commission, if it was flying that day you got it ready to fly. When it came back it was broke because KB-50s were always broke. You would work on it till it was in commission again. When it was in commission you were free to go wherever you wanted to and have a good time. Fortunately I got assigned to flying status shortly after I got there so I got to fly with the aircraft all over PACAF (Pacific Air Forces) as a, what they call, Flying Crew Chief.

LC: Let’s take those different things you mentioned one at a time. What things would go wrong with the KB-50?

WE: Oh we had a lot of engine failures, we had a lot of different things, the refueling system was hydraulically driven so there would be pump failure, pump leak, a lot of leakage, different leaks and stuff like that. I remember one of my first missions, the first time I got to fly. I was so excited about going on a mission so we were going to Wake Island. We were going to Wake Island because at that time we were, again, Vietnam was still very distant to me but we were catching F-100s coming out of the states. We were catching F-100s with the KB-50s and topping them off in the air and getting the on over to Clark Air Base. Ultimately, of course, they ended up going to Vietnam. My first trip out of there on a KB-50, I was just so excited and everything. We took off; you always made a sniff check. You would open the bomb bay doors after lift off and you would make a sniff check to make sure there were no fumes or anything going wrong there. Well we took off out of Yokota and me being excited about wanting to travel and not wanting to abort, didn’t want to abort and we took off and the reel
operators they called them, in the back end, he opened the bomb bay and all of a sudden
there was this stench coming from the bomb bay of rubber or what I thought was rubber.
He said, “What is that Crew Chief?” I sniffed and I said, “Oh that’s normal, that’s the
main gear tires hitting the brake service. There was rubbing brakes up in the gear well.
That’s just what that is.” They accepted that and we went off to Wake Island and of
course we got ready to make our approach into Wake Island and went to put the flaps
down and the flaps wouldn’t come down. Well come to find out it wasn’t the tires
rubbing the power brakes, we had burned the flap motor up on take off. We got the flaps
down and landed ok because there is redundant system in those old airplanes, but they
teased me forever about that. They said, “Yeah just ask Eads, man, everything is normal.”

LC: Everything is normal huh. (Laughter)
WE: They chided me about that for a long time. I got off on a rabbit trail there,
but it was just always a very meaty… I always looked at it very meaty, very substantial,
something I could grab on to. Just loved every minute of it and we worked hard. I mean
we partied hard and we raised hell too but by god the work was done before we partied
I’ll guarantee you that.

LC: Now speaking of partying, you went off…
WE: Next question.
LC: Ok.
WE: I’m just kidding.
LC: Well you can say whatever you like or not. You went off base, you went into
the local sort of strip area I guess, and did you hand out at the bars or…?
WE: You bet ya.
LC: Was everyone pretty much gung ho about partying when they were off?
WE: Right. All hard workers, all hard partiers.
LC: Did that kind of also set up a lot of pretty good substantial camaraderie
between the guys?
WE: You bet.
LC: Because you could both work together and kind of blow off steam.
WE: We shared girlfriends; we were really a tight group of guys I’ll say.
LC: Did you get to go around in Japan aside from the town right near Yokota?
WE: Yes, I did. I was fortunate enough to get, or misfortunate, however you want to look at it, to get to climb Mt. Fuji while I was over there.

LC: Really? Wow.

WE: Climbed up there in June and actually was in a snow shower in the middle of June up on the top of Mt. Fuji.

LC: Did a bunch of you go together? How did that get arranged?

WE: We just decided to do it. We were young guys and just full of adventure and we decided, I don’t know who took the bull by the horn, but all of a sudden we were in cars with a bunch of C-rations. Back then if you took a trip in Japan, the dining hall would give you C-rations to take with you so had meals while you were gone. We got in the car and went to Mt. Fuji and at that time you could drive up to station 5, I think it was, which was about maybe a 1/3 of the way up the mountain. We drove up there and we cashed in some of our c-rations to a local there. He let us stay in his hotel, or house, for the evening. The next morning we got up and started trudging, it was kind of a zigzag path up to the top. I remember there was 13 stations from the bottom to the top and I think we launched from station 5 and it took us about eight hours to zig zag our way to the top. That was a great experience.

LC: I bet. Did you have a local with you or did you just kind of do it yourself?

WE: You couldn’t get lost. It’s a tradition I think for a lot of the people that believe in Buddhism to make that trek. It’s kind of a pilgrimage and there was just a steady stream of people going up through there.

LC: Did you see any other Americans going up or down?

WE: Yes but I can’t remember specifically what types or anything. Mostly it was Japanese.

LC: Were you guys reverential given that this was a religious site for the Japanese or were you kind of cutting up and doing it for the hell of it.

WE: We were doing it for the adventure. We behaved ourselves because it didn’t take too long before we had to concentrate on climbing.

LC: And breathing.

WE: No, we didn’t do nothing stupid up there.

LC: You remember it as a really good thing that you did.
WE: Oh sure, yeah. Then I was fortunate enough, I dated a girl for a while over there and she got me out away from the bar scene. We took a couple of trips to a couple of the parks and stuff like that. That was an enriching time because that got me to see the real Japan if you will.

LC: And you learned a little bit more about how the Japanese live.

WE: Sure.

LC: Because you were seeing someone. Did you meet her family?

WE: No.

LC: Was she employed or was she a student?

WE: She was employed at the base.

LC: Were there a lot of Japanese working at the base?

WE: Yes.

LC: How did you meet her, where did she work in the base?

WE: I met her downtown at the bar.

LC: What did she do on the base?

WE: She worked in the visiting quarters, a maid type job.

LC: How was her English?

WE: Good, very good.

LC: How was your Japanese?

WE: Very bad. (Laughter) I didn’t speak a whole lot of Japanese. That’s another thing in high school; I wasn’t strong in foreign languages.

LC: Did you learn a couple phrases though?

WE: Oh sure.

LC: Did they kind of stick with you, have they stuck with you?

WE: Oh just greeting like (speaking in Japanese) those type things. I’ve had so many assignments in my life. Not to long ago we had a Japanese friend, not to long ago meaning a couple of years ago. I thought I was talking to her in Japanese and I said thank you in Turkish to her and she didn’t know what the heck I was talking about.

LC: You have been around.

WE: Yeah, I have been very, very fortunate and very blessed.
LC: And I want to talk to you about all those things. Let’s talk about first of all
though, your obtaining flight status, how did that happen? Flight status.

WE: It came with the territory of being an Assistant Crew Chief. The Crew Chief
and the assistant, they were on flying status and that was full flying status. I was a full
crew member, I wasn’t just hazardous duty, I was full flying status. So that was meaty
too. Can we take a hold for about five minutes?

LC: Sure. Ok Bill, we were talking about your getting flying status and that was
sort of a standard operating that came with being an Assistant Crew Chief. Did you and
Bill Decker ever go out on the same flights?

WE: Oh yes, we traveled together many places.

LC: Let’s talk about some of those places. You mentioned Wake Island. Where
did you go?

WE: Oh we went to the Philippines, we went to Vietnam, we went to Thailand,
we went to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Kadena, Okinawa, just a phenomenal
experience, you know.

LC: Now this is all during the period when you were based at Yokota between ’63
and ’65?

WE: Yes.

LC: Let’s talk about the Philippines. Do you remember your first visit out there?

WE: I don’t know whether it was the first visit or what.

LC: Ok, well one of the times

WE: Wake Island, like I said we were in this operation Flying Fish, that was the
name of it. So we were…Wake Island we caught F-100s there. Kadena we flew a lot of
training out of there, I think we were catching 101s, some 105s, different aircraft like
that. Clark, I think again we were catching F-100s and stuff like that. One interesting
thing about Clark, if I may go ahead, while I am thinking about it?

LC: Oh please do.

WE: Was the fact, I never will forget this, you talking about significant emotional
events in your life. We had just, and this is probably one of my first experiences with the
Vietnam conflict. I wasn’t going to fly that night but my aircraft was. What the mission
was that night was to catch, when I say catch I’m talking about hook up to some 101s,
that’s what I mean when I say catch, but we were going to catch some 101s or our
airplanes were. Those 101s were going to go ahead and fly over Vietnam and take some
pictures. We had gear trouble on our aircraft so we had our airplane jacked up out on the
ramp and was running a gear check on it. The other planes, they started up and they
taxied out. We’re in the 1963 time frame now, November, so I think you know where I
am going with this. They taxied out and all of a sudden here comes our planes, our
tankers taxing back in and everything. The expediter come up, his name was Skip
Foshell. I never will forget it. He comes up and we said, “What’s going on?” He said,
“Boys, the President has been shot.” Oh what an emotional time that was. You just didn’t
know what was going to happen. It was just a stunning blow to us. We were just
awestruck and just overwhelmed and everything all at the same time. So needless to say
that mission was canceled that night and then of course we were on alert over there for I
don’t know how long. I remember we busted our butts, I can’t remember how long we
worked, it seemed like we worked for a long time, hours and hours getting our airplane
ready to go. Then of course it was just a very emotional time of my assignment over
there, was the night the President got killed.

LC: Did you feel that things had become kind of destabilized by this shooting and
you weren’t sure what was going to happen next?
WE: We thought we were going to go to war. We were getting the word they
thought it might be somebody from out of the United States trying to do harm to our
country. You know being military and stuff and be half way around the world. That’s
what we thought; we weren’t getting word immediately about Harvey Oswald and all that
stuff.
LC: How long was it till you found out that there was this person named Oswald
who was accused of making the…
WE: Oh, I’m sure within the first 24 hours stuff started trickling in.
LC: And what was your source of news?
WE: You know I really can’t remember. I know we had Armed Forces Radio
Network, so it was probably AFRN, so it was probably the radio.
LC: How many planes had taken off and were part of that mission and then come
back?
WE: Two or three. KB-50s were just an unreliable aircraft at that time that you
always had an air spare and a ground spare. In other words if you had a three-plane
mission, four planes would go and one would stay on the ground ready to go. I know that
if like the fighters that were suppose to rendezvous with our tankers, I don’t think they
would leave the ground, this is what I was told, they wouldn’t leave the ground from
where they were until we were up on orbit and they knew that they had enough airplanes
to hook up to before they would take off. Because they couldn’t you know…

LC: Yeah, that makes sense. Sure, they couldn’t have a problem half way
through.

WE: Right. There were enough problems when things were going right…there are
enough problems with a couple of situations. I don’t think they were KB; they were other
airplanes that were like over the Atlantic. Sometime during my Air Force career the
fighters missed their rendezvous altogether and they were lost. It’s very important
mission we had but like I say four was suppose to go, three went and it was a two plane.
They all taxied back in of course.

LC: You mentioned that the idea for the mission that they were going to be
supporting was taking photographs.

WE: Yeah they were going to hook up with some RF-101s I think. The RF-101s
were going to take some pictures. I assume North Vietnam.

LC: Can you describe that aircraft?

WE: The RF-101?

LC: Yes.

WE: It was a fighter with a F-101 that they converted for reconnaissance.

LC: For photographic reconnaissance specifically?

WE: Yeah.

LC: Where were those planes based at, do you remember?

WE: I don’t know. I just knew that we were going to catch them.

LC: You described catching there for a moment. Can you go over that again? That
has to do with actually hooking…

WE: That’s what term I’m using; it would hook them up, hooking up or catching.

LC: Hooking up to refuel?
WE: Refuel, yeah. In our particular aircraft we had three reels that we could let out, one off each wing and one off the back end. Normally we just used the two wing reels. They would unwind these reels and at the end of the reel is what they called the paradrogue and the fighter would come up and he had a male hook up device and he would poke the probe into the paradrogue and that’s the way they would take on fuel.

LC: It was technically possible to refuel three planes at once?

WE: Yes, on a KB it was.

LC: What was the wingspread of a KB-50?

WE: I would have to go to the charts now. If you looked at a B-29, I don’t have the specs here in front of me but a B-29, they’re similar…

LC: A B-29 is huge.

WE: Yeah, well, not in today’s comparison.

LC: I know but…

WE: Back then…

LC: Back then, yeah.

WE: Back then it was huge, yeah.

LC: Ok, and primarily were you…?

WE: I can tell you this about the KB, it had four RECIP engines and two jets on it, you know four piston driven engine and two jets. The jets were J-47s and the RECIPs were 4360s, which was the biggest piston engine built; 28 cylinders, 56 spark plugs, and on and on and on.

LC: That’s a major piece of equipment. How many men did you and Bill Decker have working with you to keep you guys in the air?

WE: We were the ground support, even though we flew, we were on the fly staff because they needed us when they landed, and do you know what I am saying?

LC: Yes.

WE: We didn’t have a primary in-flight job but they carried the normal crew. The normal crew was a pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer navigator, and two reel operators.

LC: And on the ground when you or Bill or both of you would have to look over an aircraft after flight, who was working with you?
WE: We would have a specialist group we could draw from, hydraulic engine,
instrument specialist, different specialists we could draw from.

LC: And those specialists were located at the different bases that you would fly
into.

WE: Right, sometimes they would fly if it was going to be a mission where we
needed support people with us. They would fly along with us or fly in a support airplane
or something. For instance I think when we went to Australia we took some 105s. When I
went to Australia and New Zealand we took F-105s down to an air show and I can’t
remember the name, I was in New Zealand, I’m wanting to say Ohaki (correct town
spelling: Otaki) or something like that, New Zealand. We stayed down at Christchurch
and I think that our specialist and stuff I think they were flown down on the support
aircraft so that we would have specialist readily available to help us out.

LC: Christchurch on the south island?

WE: Yes.

LC: Did you get to go into town when you were in New Zealand at all?

WE: Yes.

LC: Do you remember Christchurch particularly or any of the other towns that
you visited?

WE: Yes, I remember Christchurch being a very beautiful city, very enjoyable. Of
course that was the staging area, I guess that’s not the proper term for it, but it was the
launching area for missions to the South Pole, Operation Deep Freeze.

LC: Operation Deep Freeze, do you know much about that operation?

WE: No, not at all, other than the fact that I knew, that was another thing that
always intrigued me, but I didn’t get to go down there. I knew it was at Christchurch
because there was a lot of activity at Christchurch when we were there that was
supporting Deep Freeze.

LC: Earlier you mentioned Operation Flying Fish.

WE: Right.

LC: Can you tell me whatever you know about that?

WE: Well that was just what we called the operation that we do. That was like I
said moving the F-100s and different types of fighters that took in-flight refueling over to
the Southeast Asia theatre. Now whether they were going to Southeast Asia at the time, I
don’t know. We were getting them over there.

LC: You also visited Australia. Where did you go there?

WE: Brisbane, Amberley, and Townsville.

LC: And again, did you get to get out off the base?

WE: Yes. Brisbane was neat. Townsville, I think it was either Townsend or
Townsville. It’s up on the northern coast. It was a little bit isolated, but Brisbane of

course was a major city.

LC: Yes, it is a major city. Did you get to go up and party? Did you have time on
your own to see the sites and all that?

WE: Yeah. I met a girl down in New Zealand, her and I ran around together for
the two weeks that I was down there. She showed me a lot about New Zealand and
everything.

LC: Was she a Kiwi?

WE: Yeah.

LC: Was that somebody that you were able to stay in contact with or was it just
kind of while you were there thing?

WE: Right.

LC: Did most of the guys kind of meet somebody and hang around or were you
just lucky?

WE: Well I was lucky but other guys met other people too.

LC: You said you went to New Guinea.

WE: Yes. We RONd there, Remained Over Night there, going down and coming
back.

LC: Were you at Port Moresby or where were you?

WE: Right.

LC: Can you describe the base that you stayed at?

WE: I can only remember that we had to refuel over the wing and one of the
things that they told us was that the natives that refueled our airplane, they wore shoes
and it wasn’t to protect their feet. It was that their feet were so hard and callus and
everything that when, not so much our aircraft because our aircraft wasn’t sensitive to
stuff like that, but they actually wore shoes and slippers and stuff on fighter aircraft to
keep from scratching the surface of the wing and stuff like that. Their feet were that hard.
That might be one of those urban legends, I don’t know but I do remember them being a
people that looked very leathery and stuff like that. The other thing that stands out in my
mind was of course we got to eat in a very nice, we stayed at a very nice hotel in Port
Moresby and we ate in a restaurant there. I can remember that I’d never seen so much
silverware in all my life. I had enough silverware on each side of my plate that I felt that I
could’ve used a different piece for every bite of food I took and I still had some left over.

LC: What was that about?
WE: I guess the British influence or whatever. When they put table service down
they just had a tremendous amount.

LC: Now the New Guinean natives that you were describing, were they employed
by the Australian Air Force or who were they actually working for?
WE: I don’t know whether they were working for a contract or what. Different
contractors like Wake Island I think, Lyndon Johnson had a company that was under him,
Mopac or something like that that provided services for Wake Island and different
government contracts. Now New Guinea of course being a whole different country and
everything, I don’t know whether it was a contract then there or what.

LC: You were only there just the one time?
WE: Yeah, RONd two nights, going down and coming back. My sister, as a side
bar, my sister was a missionary nurse up in Mt. Hagan, New Guinea for years over there.

LC: Was she over there the same time you were?
WE: No.

LC: That was much later, because she would have been…
WE: Just a baby.

LC: Still young, yes. Was she with the Nazarene church?
WE: Yeah.

LC: Did she go to Olivet College?
WE: No, she did not. She went to Wright State University.

LC: Wright State, ok that’s in Ohio.
WE: Dayton, yeah.
LC: And she made a career as a missionary then?
WE: No, she’s working as a nurse in Wilmington, Ohio now. She’s working for an internist, gastrologist I guess you would call them, in Wilmington, Ohio, but she served six or seven years over there.
LC: And all the time was she in the same place in New Guinea?
WE: Yes.
LC: Oh wow, what an incredible experience that must have been. It’s nice in fact that you got to actually go there even if it was only for a couple of days. Something that you can talk to her about that. What years was she over there? Do you remember roughly?
WE: I would say mid 80’s to early 90’s. My mom passed away in ’94 and she came. Maybe late 80’s to mid 90’s because I think she came home on furlough and then went back over.
LC: What an incredible experience. You also said that during this time period you did go to Thailand. I am guessing that you went there a number of times.
WE: Yes, well sometimes with the KB-50s and then there was a later experience before we come back to the States. You want me to move into it now?
LC: Well before we talk about that… That would be at the end of 1964, when you stayed there for a couple of months?
WE: Yeah.
LC: Ok, we’ll talk about that in a second. You’re earlier trips over to Thailand, where were you landing?
WE: At Takhli.
LC: At Takhli?
WE: Takhli, yes.
LC: Did you ever get to Bangkok or Chiang Mai?
WE: Oh yes.
LC: In that time period?
WE: Oh yes, well Bangkok, Chiang Mai later, that’s at a later chapter.
LC: There are several chapters and we want to talk about those. Going to Bangkok and this would be during sometime probably in 1964, late ’63 or early ’64?
WE: What, with the KBs?

LC: Yes, your first…

WE: With the KBs, yes, it was all, runs together. I think the Australia trip was early ’64. I think we did some Vietnam runs on both sides of that. I just can’t recollect that now. We were going to Thailand, are you ready to talk about that?

LC: Yeah, sure. Absolutely.

WE: One interesting story about going into Thailand the first time, we were on alert when this first broke out or when our involvement in it first broke out. We were on alert for an inordinate amount of time up in Yokota. We didn’t know where we were going or anything. Finally the mission gelled and we got on our airplane and we took off. First stop was we were all going to Kadena. We were just getting the airplanes in position, we didn’t have any refueling missions on the way so we took off to Kadena and it was late at night. The guys were tired; they had been on alert. We had a lot of mechanical things go wrong with our aircraft on take off roll but we did get it off the ground and we flew on down to Kadena. The worst thing that happened was one of the flight instruments went out, a very important flight instrument, so we flew to Kadena on our back up instruments. The guys were so tired that were flying the airplanes that one of them lined up on what he thought was the runway and he called the tower and he told the tower he would like to advise them that one side of the runway lights were out. They did a quick radar check and informed him that he was lined up on the main street of town. He got out of that situation ok. I don’t know if it was the same aircraft or another aircraft, he scraped a wing tip on landing at Kadena, again, being tired and everything. Not enough damage to keep it from going onto Bangkok for the mission. We thought we had our aircraft taken care of and so we took off out of Kadena for the next leg, which was going to take us into Bangkok. Just goes to show you how things can happen when people are tired and things aren’t working right. Well we’re flying along and we had to go around a typhoon and I was kind of back there dozing and all of a sudden I felt the airplane slipping, in other words means it was sliding through the air at a descent angle. It was very unusual, not very safe. What had happened was, we lost a couple thousand foot and what had happened was the pilot was asleep and that same flight instrument had went out again but the co-pilot didn’t realize it and he was trying to fly the airplane on that
instrument and that instrument was broke. So then the pilot woke up when he felt the airplane slip and he was fighting the co-pilot trying to get the controls out of his hand because he couldn’t convince the co-pilot that the instrument had…the terminology is caged. When an instrument cages it locks and it is not working but the guy was so tired he didn’t see the cage flag. We really had a close call on that one of course, trying to get that all straightened out. Of course on a KB-50 you got a tunnel to go through to get from the front of the plane to the back of the plane but to try to get up there and do anything, why that would have been an effort if you would of left anyway. So they got that straightened out. Then we land at Bangkok and we always carried a case of beer in the nose of the aircraft because if you ever look at a B-29 the whole front end of it is glass and the bottom of it is very cold so you could lay a case of beer in there and you could have you some liquid libation when you got to the end of your mission. Well, we get to Bangkok you know and we park the airplane and everything and everybody’s out there having a cold beer and the pilot looks over and he says, “You know what? I think that aircraft is moving.” And bigger than crap we forgot to put chocks under the wheels of the airplane. Here was this big KB-50 rolling back toward what they call the clong, which was a big water ditch. So everybody is scrambling over there, we’re throwing chocks under the wheels and the airplane is jumping over the chocks, already rolling too fast. We finally got it stopped but that’s an exciting experience, trying to recover from that whole two days of flying and the problems that went along with it. It was not easy flying back then because things, once they started rolling like exercises and that, they weren’t as exacting as they are today, do you know what I mean?

LC: Yes, the procedures weren’t as locked down for every single element of the work that needed to be done.

WE: Right.

LC: How in fact did you actually get the plane to stop?

WE: I was throwing the chocks under and I finally got it so slow down enough the chock caught it.

LC: Oh, ok. So you had to interrupt the momentum enough?

WE: Right.

LC: Well that sounds like a case of beer probably was in order for all that.
WE: But we should’ve chocked it first. One guy was up in the cockpit trying to pump the emergency brake pressure and my buddy again, Bill Decker who was my Crew Chief, I don’t know what he thought he was going to do, he grabbed on the ladder and he was trying to hold on the ladder to hold this whole airplane back you know, the entrance ladder to the cock pit. Those were the things that happened you know.

LC: Sure, yeah because you know it’s not a perfect world where everything goes perfectly. You said you had been on alert for quite a long time at Yokota. What time period was that or do you know why the alert was in place?

WE: Well because our unit was getting ready to reflex into Bangkok and then on up to Takhli to support whatever fighter missions were starting to take place.

LC: So that was your unit specifically that had been placed on alert?

WE: That was our unit, right.

LC: What about Vietnam during this period? You flew in and out of there as well?

WE: Yes, we landed there and we would go and land there mostly for maintenance and we would land there once in a while, I don’t know whither we ever flew any missions out of there or not but I think mostly we used Tan Son Nhut to transit through.

LC: Do you remember Tan Son Nhut in that period?

WE: Oh yeah I remember Tan Son Nhut. I remember Saigon. We lost an engine, had to go in there one time and then we landed there a couple of times just staging through.

LC: This is well before the big US military build up.

WE: There was “advisors” in there. We were in and out of there. I don’t know whether we were catching a lot of recon planes at that point. I know at Takhli we were actually refueling fighters because fighters were stationed with us at Takhli. They were TDY (Temporary Duty) in there from somewhere in Tennessee; I think it’s Stewart Air Force Base, Tennessee or something like that. That base has long closed now, that’s why I’m having trouble, and I think it was Stewart but they were in there with us and we would support their mission. [Note: I have later found out they were out of New Mexico.]
LC: What mission did they have, do you remember?
WE: They were flying into North Vietnam or targets in South Vietnam. I don’t
know whether much was going on in Laos at that point or what.
LC: But they were on reconnaissance missions primarily?
WE: No, I think these were strike fighters.
LC: Strike fighters?
WE: Yeah, they were F-100s.
LC: This would be 1964?
WE: Again in ’64, yeah. Now I’m cloudy on ’63, ’64, work with me.
LC: I sure will; it’s no problem.
WE: We were doing a lot early.
LC: Yeah, you were all over the place during that time period and it’s not at all
surprising.
WE: I guess I could’ve done a little bit better and pulled my orders out and
probably had them in chronological order.
LC: Well we can talk about those and whether you might be interested in donating
those to the archive at some point, not necessarily right now but maybe as some stage.
Can you describe Saigon during that time period? You said there was a US military
presence in terms of advisors.
WE: Yes there was. We stayed, well it was very open to us, we stayed downtown.
We pulled for them. We had it pretty well made. There were a couple incidences that I
remember. I remember one day we were out, in fact my buddy reminded me about this,
Bill Decker; again, we were flying together. They used to have these little Renault
taxicabs. We were on our way from our hotel from our hotel back out to the base one day
and we got on the street by the palace and got right in the middle of a coup. Of course we
were scared to death. We were on this street in this little blue Renault taxicab and he [the
driver] didn’t know what to do. We’re telling him to turn around and get out of there.
Here tanks are coming down the street towards us and soldiers are jumping up over the
palace wall and I’m not too sure that a couple of them used our taxi cab as launching
zones to jump over the wall. I got outside, my adrenaline was pumping so fast that I got
outside and Decker can verify this, I actually got on the front end of that taxi cab and I
lifted the bumper of the taxi cab up and I bounced that taxi cab up and did a complete 180
and jumped back in the cab and told him to get the hell out of there. I got out and turned
the cab around.

LC: Because there was no way to go forward with tanks coming at you.
WE: That’s right. My adrenaline was pumping so hard that I actually physically
got out and turned that damn cab around.

LC: Did you get back out to Tan Son Nhut with no other issues?
WE: Yeah, no other problems. As I remember, we either went on to Tan Son Nhut
or we went back to the hotel and we were made to stay in our hotel for a day or two.
LC: What hotel were you staying at? Do you remember? Was it the one that
everybody was using?
WE: I get my Thailand names and my Vietnam names mixed up. We didn’t stay
at the big one. We stayed at another one there. If I heard the name I would probably
remember it but I can’t recall it right now.

LC: Imperial or Continental, Majestic?
WE: Continental sounds, was Continental the big one?
LC: Yes.
WE: No, we didn’t stay at the big one.
LC: It was another one.
WE: Yeah, it was another one. We stayed there. I do remember the Continental
was kind of on the square there wasn’t it?
LC: Yes.
WE: We didn’t stay there. We stayed in…if I heard the name of it. What’s
coming in my mind right now is we stayed in a hotel called the Naha or the Nana in
Bangkok but that’s a different chapter.

LC: Ok, well this tale of the coup is interesting. Did you have any information
about what was going on in Saigon?
WE: Well we knew things were tense but you learn to live around that. There
were so many things going on. A lot of people don’t understand that the Buddhist and
Catholics were fighting during all that, up around Bien Hoa and all that stuff. There was
religious wars going over there too and stuff. Just a lot going on over there, just a very
confusing time.

LC: Were you getting any kind of briefings when you would be about to leave for
a mission, say to Thailand, or Saigon?

WE: No, strictly follow the leader who was the pilot and go.

LC: And you were just kind of there to do your job and the fact that you had some
time off you were just free to fill that however you wanted to.

WE: Right.

LC: Did you see the tanks or did you hear they were coming?

WE: Yeah.

LC: You actually could see them?

WE: Oh yeah, they come around the corner. They blocked us in. They were tanks
or personnel carriers. I remember them as tanks.

LC: And you were sitting right in front of the Presidential Palace?

WE: Right. About how many soldiers were in the street? Could you make a
guess?

LC: A bunch. Did things seem to be coordinated or was it just chaos?

WE: They were just coming up the street and going over the wall, I remember
that.

LC: Going for the palace?

WE: Yeah.

LC: Did you hear any explosions or gunfire or anything like that?

WE: No, we got out of there. We were where we shouldn’t be. I mean we had side
arms on. We had the Smith and Western six-inch barrel things on. Our objective was to
get the hell out of there. It wasn’t our problem; you know what I mean?

LC: Sure. Absolutely. Did you see any other US military personnel around there?

WE: Not at all.

LC: Well that must have been pretty frightening.

WE: Well I was pumped.

LC: Yeah, sounds like it. (Laughter)
WE: He [Decker] still talks about that. I had remembered doing it but you know
sometimes you think well did I really do that or is that just something I built in my mind
that I did that. He told the story. He said, “You ought of seen Eads, he got out of that cab
and he turned the cab completely around.” (Laughter) Couldn’t believe it because he was
sitting in the cab.

LC: You guys then went back, maybe to the hotel or something and you kind of
had a lock down for a little while?

WE: Right, we were done for a while.

LC: How did you find out that you were? Were you told not to go anywhere?

WE: Yeah, it was kind of a word of mouth type thing.

LC: Ok, sure. Do you remember other incidents when you were in Vietnam in that
time period, other things that happened? What was Tan Son Nhut like?

WE: Very busy.

LC: Was it very busy?

WE: Very, very busy. I’m sure that it was coordinated, you know everybody
knew what they were doing, but it just seemed like a very confusing area. Everybody had
a mission to do and they did it. One funny story that happened speaking of Tan Son Nhut
and Bien Hoa, one of our tankers came back, you have to remember to appreciate the fact
that navigation over there at that time wasn’t…navigational aids and stuff like approach
controls weren’t what they are today. We had a KB, thought he was landing at Tan Son
Nhut and he landed at Bien Hoa because I guess the runway headings are pretty close to
being the same thing and Bien Hoa and Than Son Nhut are not that far apart.

LC: Right, it’s like 25 miles.

WE: Yeah. And so the KB landed a Bien Hoa and the pilot says, “Well we made a
mistake, we landed at Bien Hoa. Let’s get on board and we’ll fly to Tan Son Nhut.” And
I guess one of the flight engineers said, “Sir if it’s ok with you I’ll just take a bus.”
(Laughter) It ticked the pilot off because the pilot screwed up and went to the wrong
place.

LC: Right, maybe I won’t just risk that again.
WE: I’ll take the bus. So I guess that’s case and point even in the worst of times we as humans or we as crazy Americans or something we can crank some humor into it even in the worst situations.

LC: I think that’s right. Did you guys get along pretty well as Crew Chief and Assistant Crew Chief with the pilots? What was the relationship there?

WE: Mostly very good. In fact to this very day every once in a while the TAC (Tactical Air Command), they call it TAC Tankers, they’ll have a reunion and they invite all the Crew Chiefs and everything.

LC: So you were a part of the crew?

WE: Right we were a part of the crew and we were recognized as such. I’m sure there were some of them that put people in classes and stuff like that but for the most part it was just great.

LC: And there was respect there and recognition of each other’s skills.

WE: Yes. Right.

LC: Did you, with all this moving around on different flight assignments, hook up with the same pilots several times? Did you see the same people over and over or was it…

WE: We didn’t have permanent crews but we knew most the guys that were in the… [421st ARS] We were in the OMS, which was the Organizational Maintenance Squadron and they were in the actual Refueling Squadron. We knew, especially being assigned a Crew Chief or Assistant Crew Chief, you knew them, especially when you were flying.

LC: What was your OMS Squadron number?

WE: I am wanting to say it was the 441st.

LC: How long did you stay with that group?

WE: I was there from March or April of ’63 and I rotated back. We lost one aircraft over Japan and then we lost another aircraft over Thailand and I think there was another loss in Europe and they decided that it was time to junk the KB-50s. So in January of ’65 I brought a KB back to the bone yard of Davis Monthan.

LC: In Arizona?
WE: Yes, and I PCSd (Permanent Change of Station) on to my next assignment from there.

LC: In January ’65?

WE: Yeah. We lost that airplane over Thailand. We lost an airplane in Japan and the crew, only one or two of the crew got out.

LC: Out of a general crew of?

WE: I forget how many was on that airplane but I would say there was probably eight or nine on it. What was happening was we were having some engine fires and stuff like that. An airplane took off out of Takhli, I wasn’t there at the time but an airplane took off out of Takhli and had an engine fire and by the time he got that engine under control another engine fire lights went on and so they decided they weren’t going to take the same risk as the other guys did and try to clean it up so they bailed out. This unfortunately the aircraft continued to fly and it flew into a Thai village and killed a bunch of people when it crashed.

LC: Was the crew saved?

WE: Yeah, the crew made it, they all bailed out. They thought explosion was imminent you know. As it was, the airplane ended up flying into a Thai village, which was kind of a sad thing.

LC: Very sad.

WE: The Thais were very loyal to us.

LC: Yes, that’s extremely sad.

WE: So anyway they decided to junk the airplane. I’m sure the airplanes were programmed to be junked anyway but after we lost that one in Thailand, all the airplanes were grounded and I remember we didn’t fly any more missions on them. We just got them back, tried to get what we could back to Yokota and get ready to prepare them for disposal back at Davis Monthan and then it was at that time that we got this notification that they were wanting, I don’t think they identified us by name or they were wanting us to volunteer to go back to some place where we did not know where we were going but ended up being Udorn, Thailand and I’ll tell you about that when you’re ready.

LC: Ok, actually this is a good time. You were assigned over there for a couple of months in late ’64?
WE: Late ’64. I think we deployed, had no idea where we were going, had no idea. Just told to pack our bags. Again it was some of those same guys; we all jumped on the bandwagon, a bunch of eager beavers. Some of the guys that I had went to tech school with and had served there in that unit with; we all decided that we were bored with sitting around and doing nothing, let’s go on this mission. We don’t know where we’re going or what we are going to do but let’s go.

LC: Let’s do it, ok.

WE: A couple of days later we ended up in a little place called the Udorn Air Force Base.

LC: Can you describe the base when you arrived there?

WE: Concrete was still curing. It was August; the concrete had been poured March of that year, that was the date on the concrete. We were using outhouses to go to the restroom. We did have hard backed tents, so in other words the buildings did have frames. I remember you always wanted to get to the shower first because if you got the shower first at the end of the day, you got the warm water. When they decided trucking more water from town, it was extremely cold so you wanted to get where the sun had warmed the water and get you a shower and get out of there. When the water turned cold, very sparse, very basic but again very intriguing and very meaty mission. We were working on T-28s and sending T-28s up country to a little unknown country at the time called Laos. They were in turn flying missions out of Laos.

LC: Now the T-28s that you were servicing, to you, had you looked at a T-28 in any kind of detail since advanced training?

WE: No. These were souped up T-28s. They were a lot more powerful and stuff then the T-28 in basic training. As souped up as you can make a T-28.

LC: The mission that they were flying, do you know anything about that, up to Laos?

WE: Thai mercenaries were flying missions up into Laos and Air America was involved in it. I don’t know what their targets were at the time. I knew more about the targets on my ’67, ’68 tour over there. We were flying them out of Thailand, I can’t remember at this time whether we were arming out of Thailand or not. I think we did
some arming out of Thailand and like I said there were Americans that flew some
missions too.

LC: Air America.
WE: Yeah Air America type things. In fact there were some pilots lost out of that
unit.

LC: While you were there?
WE: Yeah. I think they were over looking for somebody else and then they run
into a mountain or something over in Vietnam.

LC: Where they in the T-28?
WE: Right.

LC: That T-28, what kind of engines did that aircraft have?
WE: They were piston driven. I think they were 13 something was the size of the
engine. Single row, seven cylinders I think.

LC: Was that essentially a fighter aircraft?
WE: Yes, trainer fighter.

LC: Trainer fighter.
WE: Yeah trainer fighter.

LC: What’s the distinction?
WE: A lot of those T-28s were used for training pilots and then they were
modified and bigger engines were put on them. Instead of having four bomb stations;
they had six bomb stations and changed their guns around a little bit.

LC: Did you have any kind of relationships with the Thai Pilots?
WE: Oh yes, we were very close. Not so much in that two months but in later
things we will talk about.

LC: The Air America guys, did you kind of hang out with them?
WE: Off and on. We were all just a bunch of work hard, party hard type guys.

LC: Yeah and there weren’t very many people there really.
WE: No, it was kind of unknowing. It was very top secret but it was just you
know I don’t think a whole lot of people knew what was going on at that point.

LC: How many T-28s were based there during this time period when you were
there?
WE: I would say we had 20 of them, 15-20 of them.

LC: And was Bill Decker there with you too?

WE: No, Bill didn’t go with us on that. The guys that I went through tech school: Jack Dawson, Bill Massock, and Caserelle, and Al Curtis.

LC: Some of the usual suspects then.

WE: Some of the usual suspects, right. (Laughter)

LC: Did you have any idea how long you were going to be there?

WE: I think it was supposed to be a 60 day TDY or 90 days, but I knew that I was suppose to rotate, my two years were up in March or April so I knew that it couldn’t be forever.

LC: Yours and Bill’s, Bill Massock and the other guys to right?

WE: Right.

LC: Had you picked up much about the Gulf of Tonkin incident and what was going on in the United States in terms of the Johnson Administration thinking about Vietnam? Did you have any ideas, information about that?

WE: No. Let’s see Gulf of Tonkin…

LC: So that would be the August 1964 confrontation between some boats in the…

WE: No, the only thing that comes to my mind about Gulf of Tonkin was we had a couple of, and this is probably completely off base with what you are talking about, but a couple of A-1Hs landed off the USS Constellation and one of them had picked up a bullet hole in his propeller and they landed at Udorn and had us look at it because they wanted to know if we could repair it and I took a look at it and I said, “We don’t have the capability, you’re going to have to get a crew in off the Constellation and they talked that over a little bit and decided that they were going to try to fly back over to the Constellation. I think as I remember we took a file and we filed as much as we could of the prop blade to get it to where it was smooth, aerodynamically smooth and fueled them up. They got out on the runway and run it up and no vibrations, eased up on the power and away they went.

LC: And those Navy guys…

WE: Those were Navy guys.
LC: Yeah and how did they feel about having to ask the Air Force for help? Were they gracious about?
WE: At the first I think they were glad just get on the ground.
LC: Sure, I bet you because they must have had a lot of shimmying and stuff. Did they describe what was going in the aircraft as they were flying?
WE: He knew he picked up a hit but he didn’t realize where it was till he landed. He thought he had taken a hit in the prop. Even though the prop was spinning fast through the whirl of the prop blade they could see a hole or something, but they were just glad to get on the ground and then they were glad to get out of there too. They looked around and they knew they didn’t want to spend a whole lot of time at Udorn.
LC: Right. You didn’t mind being there did you?
WE: Nope, had a good time. Went down and met another work hard, party hard place. You got to remember Laura I was single at the time so I could…
LC: You could do whatever you wanted to.
WE: I could do whatever I wanted to, right.
LC: And you guys did, right?
WE: We partied a little bit too hard there one night and got ourselves a little bit of trouble but we overcame it.
LC: Was it trouble of the local kind or was it military?
WE: We went down town and busted up a bar one night, drinking and carrying on. That was just letting off some steam. We got our butts chewed and then got forgiven for it. We made restitution; we went down and helped the gal get her bar fixed back together and stuff.
LC: Did the local Thai police get involved in that one?
WE: No.
LC: Ok, well that was probably good.
WE: We went right back across the street to the base.
LC: This women that owned the bar, do you remember her?
WE: Patsy was her name.
LC: Patsy. How was her English?
WE: Good enough, I don’t know about her English but her aim was good enough that she threw a chunk of ice at my buddy, Cascella, there and cut his eye, split his eye open and we had to take him to the hospital on emergency. That’s how we all got found out.

LC: Patsy was a tough lady.

WE: Patsy threw a chunk of ice at him about as big as a softball.

LC: What kind of stuff was Patsy able to serve up there? Did she have a good selection?

WE: Yeah, she had local Thai whiskey and Thai beer and stuff like that.

LC: Did she have any American stuff or European?

WE: No, they had a Black Label beer but I don’t know where that stuff come from, it wasn’t very good.

LC: That really didn’t stop you guys.

WE: We use to laugh at the…you could read the date that the whiskey was made on the back of the label and I’m sure some of the other guys have told you that too.

LC: Yes.

WE: It was like two months old, good stuff.

LC: Yeah, good. When time came for you to be out of Udorn after whatever 60 days, were you guy’s kind of reluctant to leave or had you had enough?

WE: Ready to go home. It was very Spartan over there. We had fulfilled ourselves. We had taken care of the mission as far as we knew it. Worked hard and had taken care of our portion of it and people came in and relieved us.

LC: And your next sort of major assignment was that you needed to get onto a KB-50 that was going back to the States for DECOM (Decommission) or whatever.

WE: Right.

LC: That then would be your first time back to the States since you left for Japan, WE: Yes.

LC: Did you have a leave there once you arrived? Well was it like to get back into the States?

WE: Oh it was great of course. I went back, we landed there at Davis Monthan, and we were bringing those KB-50s in. Davis Monthan told us when we got them all on
the ground; I guess they told one of our pilots, they said, “Here we are a junk yard for
airplanes. That’s the most in-flight emergencies we’ve ever had was all those KB-50s
trying to get in there and they were all broke.” Everything trying to land, they said
they’ve never had so many in-flight emergencies getting them on the ground. It was
definitely time to retire those airplanes.

LC: Well it’s amazing that you had a part in keeping what was clearly a difficult
piece of equipment in the air; I mean that’s pretty amazing. You had worked on what was
one of the most difficult to maintain aircraft. What were the KB-50s replaced with?

WE: Of course 135s. A 135 could refuel quicker with one paradrogue than we
could refill three with at one time.

LC: No kidding.

WE: Yeah because they could just pump the fuel faster, you know.

LC: And what was the mechanism for moving the fuel faster? Was it a bigger
pump or a better pump system?

WE: I don’t know that much about a 135 but it was just more state of the art. I’m
sure the pumps were bigger; the hoses were bigger.

LC: So the volume was greater.

WE: Volume exactly.

LC: And your new specialty then have the T-28s, was that what you were now an
expert on?

WE: Well not really. As an APG (Aircraft General) guy, Airplane General guy,
you’re expected to work on APG with a shred out, which was RECIPs you’re expected to
work on any and all RECIPs, so it was just another aircraft that I gained experience on. It
came into play later when we’ll talk about that, my second visit to…

LC: Sure, well let’s take a break right here Bill.

WE: Ok.

LC: Ok Bill, you were talking about being at the bone yard and the guys they are
telling you about how many problems they’ve had KB-50s.

WE: Right.

LC: How long did you stay there?

WE: Just for one or two nights and then I went on home to Cincinnati.
LC: What was it like to see your family again?
WE: Oh it was great. My brothers had grown about 16 foot it seemed like. They’d become young teenagers. They were all involved in sports. My parents welcomed me with open arms. It was just great.
LC: Did you feel they were proud of you?
WE: Excuse me?
LC: Did you feel that they were proud of you?
WE: Oh yes, no doubt about it
LC: That’s great. How did it feel to be back around some of your old haunts and your old friends? Did you feel like part of things there still or a little bit distance now that you had been all over Southeast Asia?
WE: Could appreciate being back home but felt that they were very, not my parents so much, but the mind set was much narrower versus I had some life experiences behind me. Some of those guys that I run with they had served in the service by that time too so we had some good times talking about that and everything. It was interesting catching up on what the guys there locally had done. At that point in my life I was still young enough to remember the good times there also.
LC: Oh absolutely, but you did sense a difference yourself and say high school friends?
WE: Oh yes, no doubt about that.
LC: Were you there very long? How long was your leave?
WE: I took 30 days.
LC: Ok, that’s quite a good long leave then.
WE: I took 30 days because I wanted to spend time with my family. I had been gone a long time and I had the time on the books. Then one of the guys that I had been stationed with over there, I was waiting for him to come over and hook up and we were going to go to our next assignment together. He was going to Pope Air Force Base and then I was going to Hunter Air Force Base.
LC: When did you learn about the assignment, the Hunter?
WE: Toward the end of my tour in Japan, within a couple of months of that. They may have notified me down at Thailand. I don’t know, I can’t remember.
LC: Do you know when you arrived at Hunter, when that would have been?
WE: Around February.
LC: February ’65.
WE: Around February ’65, yeah. I fell immediately in love.
LC: With…?
WE: My wife, Juanita.
LC: Ok and you meet her where?
WE: At a party. Where else would I meet people, right? (Laughter)
LC: Right and you met her once you had arrived in Georgia?
WE: I dropped Hadley off at Pope. He’s another one that I’ll be seeing in Las Vegas. Dropped him off at Pope and I came on down to Hunter and immediately got involved C-124s. One of these days I’ll get to an aircraft you’ll recognize.
LC: This is actually all after my particular period of study, which I’ll tell you about later. You met Juanita right away, very quickly?
WE: Very early into it. Shortly there after in the month of July we decided to tie the knot and we’ve been married for, be 39 years this year.
LC: That’s wonderful.
WE: I was ready to settle down.
LC: That was a big switch.
WE: And you know why, I mean because I had, short of marriage, which has been very full, I had lived life on the other side to its fullest I had felt.
LC: And you kind of felt that you had done that and now you wanted…?
WE: Didn’t need to chase no more, needed a little bit of grounding in my life.
LC: Where was she from?
WE: Front Royal, Virginia.
LC: I’m sorry can you say it again?
WE: Front Royal, Virginia.
LC: What was she doing down there in Georgia?
WE: She had recently went through a divorce and was living down there.
LC: That’s where she was living?
WE: Yes.
LC: Ok. Did she have any children?

WE: Yes. We won’t go a whole lot about that.

LC: I see. So you just fell in love really quickly and you knew that was the right thing to do.

WE: Yes, very much so.

LC: Working on the C-124’s, did you fall in love with the aircraft too?

WE: Pretty much so. Again I got the opportunity to fly and so I was on a mission where we flew support. Of course I was also a ground pounder meaning I worked on the aircraft on the ramp, but when a mission would come up we would fly in what they call the Downrange Mission and we would fly support for the missiles being launched out of Cape Canaveral at the time. We would fly the Bahama chain, taking supplies, people, and other things down through there, Bahama, Luthra, Antigua, those islands down through there on the chain because that’s where the tracking stations were for the missile launches.

LC: Did you visit any of those tracking stations or did that all happen…?

WE: It was just that there’s not much but the station itself on those islands that I can remember and so we would kind of walk along the beach and hang out at the bars or the rec place that was right there. I can’t remember any towns per say that we went to.

LC: Did you spend most of your time traveling out of Hunter rather than being on the ground there?

WE: No I was on the ground quite a bit but I would say probably say 75, 25. Twenty-five being out, 75 being on the ground. I also got into a mission hauling class A explosives which puts nuclear weapons out of there and that required special clearances and stuff so once I got into that mission well then I was pretty well locked into flying that.

LC: Did you have to go through a new clearance procedure?

WE: Oh yeah.

LC: Can you describe that? Were you interviewed?

WE: Oh yeah I was interview, and went through all of that. I got called in because that’s one of the first times that all of a sudden it became important who my real father was. Of course I didn’t know nor did I ever seek him out. They had went by the house
and they had upset my mom by saying they were going to have to interview him and stuff.

LC: And there had never been any relationship there at all.

WE: Never what so ever. So I walked in and I told this Major, I said, “Look I really want to fly on this mission. However, the dad that I live he’s my real dad. I’ve had no interface with my biological dad.” I said, “You’ve got my mom upset. They’re Christians.” At that time it was taboo, divorces and marriages and all that. In fact they weren’t blew out of the saddle that I was marrying a divorcee. Beside all that I told him, “Just forget about me. Send me back to the flight line. I don’t want the clearance.” He sent me away and ended up getting a waver and so I got to fly.

LC: How did you find out about your mom being upset? Were you calling home, writing?

WE: Well yeah, she called me and said they had been at the house.

LC: Were you staying in pretty close communication with them when there wasn’t a crisis like this? Were you writing back and fourth?

WE: Oh yeah. We communicated. They weren’t real happy with me, getting married that quick but just like they got use to me being in the Air Force, they got use to her.

LC: The decisions you make quickly have tended to be pretty good, at least in my listing.

WE: I’m a right brainer I guess. Not all of them have been good decisions. The ones that I’m going to tell you are. (Laughter) Just kidding.

LC: That’s fair. The class A missions where you were moving, you were on aircraft that were moving nuclear…

WE: Nuclear stuff, right.

WE: Nuclear weapons or parts of nuclear weapons.

LC: Right, exactly.

LC: Where were you going?

WE: Well we went to PACAF we went back into the Pacific. Sometimes we went to Europe. We went around in the States picking up stuff, taking it over, bringing outdated stuff back, that type thing.
LC: And this is all during the time you were based at Hunter?

WE: Hunter and then the mission moved to Dover in ’66, 6th of the 31st Military Airlift Squadron.

LC: I’m sorry 6th of the 31st?

WE: I said, if we moved up there in ’66 and it was the 31st Military Airlift squadron. It was all tied in with an outfit called 7th Log out of Warner Robins, Georgia. They were ultimately responsible for the movement of all this stuff.

LC: About how many missions did you go on that were class A? Do you have any idea?

WE: Numerous to PACAF, numerous to the Atlantic or to Europe. I would say maybe 10. I don’t known 10 maybe. It all runs together you know, at least 10.

LC: Sure. Well you did so many of them.

WE: Right.

LC: During this period then you did get to go to Europe finally.

WE: Yes.

LC: Do you remember that?

WE: Yes. I remember staying in Germany. I didn’t get away from the aircraft; we landed in Belgium one time and landed in Mildenhall one time, got to go downtown there. Got to go downtown at Rhine Main and Ramstein, a couple of places like that. That’s about as far as we went with it.

LC: Did visiting Germany leave any kind of impression on you like you thought it might?

WE: No, very green [meaning landscape]. I picked up on the people not being as friendly as I would have liked them to have been. They are a harder or the people we had contact with were harder type people in personality.

LC: During the time that you had moved on to Dover Air Force Base, so that would be 1966, the United States was beginning to really become deeply involved in committing forces to Vietnam. Were you paying much attention to that?

WE: Sure, I was picking up more rank, more responsibility and I was keeping my ear to the ground about that because I knew that my time was coming up again to go back over. I knew it was just a matter of time before I would get sent back over there just by
the nature of my job specialty and by the nature of what they used in Vietnam as far as
flying and stuff like that. It was really interesting because I went from working at Hunter
we were so flush with people, other than the Dominican Crisis and the Dominican Crisis
happened while I was at Hunter and we were so fat on people that you would go into
work and I’m talking about when I was working on the ground there, you could go into
work four days a week. It was four and two. At the end of roll call a lot of times you were
sent home two days out of those four days you were on. You would go on home because
there wasn’t that much going on. Of course when the Dominican Crisis broke out then all
hell broke lose on that. That didn’t last all that long. I forget how many missions we
turned there at Hunter, those 124s. It was hundreds of missions we turned in so many
days. But then conversely I went to Dover Air Force Base and it was hell up there. I went
from working 4 and 2 to working 6 and 1 and we would work 12 hours a day; 12:30 in
the morning till, I’m sorry, 7:30 in the morning till 7:30 at night and then the other crew
would come on. We would do that for six days and then we would have one day off
which really didn’t boil down to be a day off because then you would come in and you
would work 7:30 night till 7:30 in the morning. That was pretty horrendous duty, between
the mosquitoes and everything else. That night duty was hell. I had all intentions to hang
it up. If you look at the timeline there, you can see that I was running out of my first four
years and I was strutting my stuff saying I was going to get the hell out of the Air Force
at that time, I didn’t want no more to do with it because it was rough up there. I mean it
was almost a vacation to go on a flying mission. I had applications in, I had an
assignment or I had an application into the Air Force Reserve over in Andrews Air Force
Base who also flew 124s. I talked to my wife and my wife said, “Well I’m behind you
100%. But you need to have a job when you get out.” They had a pretty nice enlistment
bonus for aircraft maintenance because they were needing them in Vietnam. So I got cold
feet and I said, “Well I’m going to go ahead and stay in.” Of course I had to kind of tuck
my tail between my legs when I went back to work and told them I decided to reenlist
because I had been running my mouth. I stayed in; I went ahead and stayed in.
Committed myself. At that time I felt I felt like I was committing myself for a career and
I… Wouldn’t you know a week later Andrews notified me to come over for the interview
for a job position. That would have been probably a pretty good thing too. It was good
pay and everything else but hey I had to make a decision so I made it and that’s the way I made it.

LC: Did you feel regretful when you got the call from Andrews, it was apparently a civilian position that they were interested in having you for or did you just think well it’s not meant to be. I’ve already decided.

WE: Well I don’t look back. You can wish whatever. I guess my feelings initially were to say well yeah probably I would’ve liked to went over there and tried that out because the 12 hour shifts were still happening at Dover. Maybe by then it had lightened up a little bit, it seems to me it may have lightened up a little bit but it still wasn’t good and of course still I was, pardon the expression, Sahara Hotel would be shit hot to go back to Vietnam.

LC: And by reenlisting you had enough knowledge of the situation that you knew that you were probably end up getting over there?

WE: You bet you.

LC: Let’s take a break Bill.

WE: Ok.
Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I am continuing my oral history interview with William Eads. I am in the Interview Room of the Special Collections Building on the campus of Texas Tech, that’s here in Lubbock, Texas. Mr. Eads is in Orlando. Good morning Mr. Eads.

William Eads: How are you ma’am?

LC: I’m very good, thank you. We were talking about your stay at Dover Air Force Base and you had commented that there was a great deal of work going on there, that there was a ton of activity. Do you have idea why there was suddenly so much activity there?

WE: I think that the mission up there because they were both in support of Europe and Southeast Asia, it was a cargo type mission. They had 124s up there and they had 141s. It was a hub, it was a port of call and it was just a lot of things going on. I think the personnel strength wasn’t up to what it should be at that point.

LC: So there were too few people maybe doing a bigger mission?

WE: Yes ma’am. Things were really picking up at that time because there were people getting promoted below the zone, in the enlisted ranks and stuff like that.

LC: Now below the zone can you explain what that means?

WE: For instance I made E-5 under four, which was almost unheard of. Security police, aircraft maintenance, and some AFSCs (Air Forces Services Command) like that. Some jobs specialties got promoted because there just wasn’t enough people to cover the slots so things were wide open.

LC: You decided in this time frame, this would be 1967-68, to reenlist?

WE: Yes ma’am. I was not going to; I think I told you that last week when we talked. I was not going to but my wife said, “Well you need to have a job.” After telling a
lot of people that I was getting out, ha ha, I had to go back with a case of humble pie and say, “I’m going to stick with you guys.”

LC: Did you actually feel pretty good about that decision; it’s just that you had kind of telegraphed something else?

WE: Yeah once the decision was made, I felt very comfortable that I stayed. Of course I knew that I was ripe to go overseas.

LC: By going overseas, do you mean particularly Southeast Asia?

WE: Yes ma’am.

LC: Ok, can you say why?

WE: Well because they were rotating us, starting to send aircraft maintenance, weapons guys, you know people like that over there. I was ripe for a return because I had a long tour but I hadn’t had a short tour.

LC: Right and you’re posting to Southeast Asia came through at what point? Do you remember?

WE: I remember I left sometime in the August time frame of ’67. I would say my orders came probably, I think they were moving quite fast, my orders probably came a couple months prior to that. I think I was on leave when I got my port call.

LC: You were on leave from…

WE: Yeah because things were moving kind of quick and I was actually on PCS leave waiting to ship over there when I got my port call to go over there.

LC: What exactly did your orders say?

WE: Well I was going to Udorn Thailand. They had APOs and everything; I can’t remember what the APO (Army and Air Force Post Office) for that was.

LC: Since you had already been there, did you have a particular feeling about this posting coming your way?

WE: Yes I thought well I kind of had my sights set on working up country, if I could get up country, because I knew that there was…well what I felt was a lot of reward, meaty type job plus there was extra pay benefits by going up country, up country meaning, Laos at that time.

LC: Do you remember arriving in Udorn?
WE: Very vaguely, I remember we came in on a 130 and then the next thing I remember was well of course I noticed that the base had built up quite a bit since I had been there before. They had a lot more activity, tremendous amount of activity. Things had gotten better as far as the plumbing facilities and shower facilities and stuff like that, although they were still living in hooches, screen type barracks type things, very tropical type stuff.

LC: About how many more personnel and planes were there on your second arrival there?

WE: Well it was tremendous. Air America was certainly built up more then. There was an F-4 outfit in there. There was a 121, kind of a secretive 121; it worked special missions. I don’t know exactly what they did, but they were there. There was A-1Hs there, Sandys you know; it was just a very active base.

LC: What did you know about the missions that were generally being flown out of Udorn? Did you have any idea of the typical characteristics of where they were actually flying to?

WE: Well I knew they were in North Vietnam and I knew that if I got back in that T-28 outfit, I knew what they were doing. They were flying training. They were training people of course in Thailand but they had their missions up country so I knew what they were doing. I knew the F-4s were flying over North Vietnam. God knows what Air America and Continental and them were doing.

LC: Right, right.

WE: Although I knew them, just didn’t ask a lot.

LC: Sure. Now what was your actual assignment at this point?

WE: Originally I think they were going to put me in A-1Hs and then when I got up to personnel...the first good news I got was because I had had that three months TDY before that they were going to curtail my assignment by three months and that made me feel real good. That meant I was only going to be over there, you know, between nine and ten months which made me jubilant. The next thing, I think they were going to put me in A-1s and then once they found out that I had T-28 experience why they were happy to put me down in a T-28 outfit and as soon as I got down there of course I started not only working hard but I started trying to negotiate a job up country.
LC: Why were you anxious to get up country as it were to Laos?
WE: Well a meaty assignment, very, you know kind of a mercenary type thing. There was extra money to be made up there and so forth. I had a family, I had a wife and a child back in the states and so it was nice if I could get up there, which I eventually did to be able to live off that money and let her have all my paycheck and stuff.
LC: Now what was the pay differential? Do you remember those scales?
WE: No, what it boiled down to was you got paid kind of a cost of living allowance. Quarters were quite nice up there. As I remember your quarters were taking, no I guess they reimbursed us for our quarters and then we paid rent on those places but they were great big houses, maid service, and the whole nine yards, very nice.
LC: What were you using for money up there?
WE: I guess American dollars sometimes and kip. I think they called the Laotian money kip. God I haven’t thought of that word in a long time.
LC: Yes, but you’re right. That’s exactly correct. So can you tell me how long you were actually in Udorn and when did you go up to Laos?
WE: I think I went up there sometime maybe late September and I come back in the States in May. So I didn’t spend much time back at Udorn when I come back down country so I would say probably September through early May.
LC: Was it difficult to arrange that; was it a TDY up to Laos?
WE: No, they were geared to process people up there, you know. Course they took away your id card. You left your uniforms down there, you went up there in civilian clothes and as I remember it I processed out of our T-28 headquarters there. We were assigned I think it was the 56th Air Commando Squadron or something like that. We signed out of there and then we went up and we processed through the air attaché’s office up in Vientiane and then I went on to, you know and had a air attaché’s id card and stuff like that. Then I went to Savannakhet, my first end assignment there was Pakse. I went to Savannakhet for a little bit of familiarization and I went to Pakse and I was down at Pakse for I think a couple of months.
LC: How did you feel about having to basically leave your official US Air Force identity kind of behind and come into Laos under this different set of arrangements?
WE: I loved it; I mean I thought it was neat. The mercenary type atmosphere, the whole thing of being over there with all the other guys and everybody was Mister over there and everybody was appreciated for what they contributed to the cause, just very meaningful.

LC: Were you given much in the way of official briefings as to why you had to go through this particular step of leaving your military id and uniforms and so forth behind?

WE: Well we knew we weren’t officially supposed to be up there, we knew that. We assumed that that was just part of the way the game was played, you know.

LC: I just wondered if there were any kind of briefings or official statements to you, maybe when you were in Savannakhet or even later on about how you were suppose to act or if there was any special maybe burdens on you while you were in Laos that weren’t on you when you were at a US Air Force Base?

WE: No, not really. You were up there and you were suppose to behave yourself certainly and you weren’t suppose to be sticking out like a sore thumb, kind of just blend in with the scenery, if an American could do that in Laos.

LC: The brief period you stayed at Savannakhet, can you tell us what happened there?

WE: Well Savannakhet, like I say I was just there for a couple days, and all I remember is just familiarization a little bit. I really can’t remember a lot about Savannakhet. I guess we worked on T-28s there also but I can’t for some reason I can’t remember a lot about Savannakhet. In my mind I can see pictures of a couple guys there. I can’t even remember their names now and I think when you look at the slides and when we talk about the slides you’ll see some shots up there of course. My big memory was of course Pakse because that was my assignment. I was the guy in charge of the aircraft there and there was another aircraft mechanic but he supported the 0-1, the FAC airplanes and we had two FAC airplanes down there. I had about three T-28s, three maybe four T-28s that would cycle in and out of there. I had locals helping me with that. There were two Forward Air Controllers down there, a guy by the name of O’Neil and a guy, academy grad, by the name of T.R. Young.
LC: Now let’s talk about those FAC aircraft for a minute. Their rotation and their maintenance and so forth was not part of what you were doing. You said there were separate crews there.

WE: Yeah but we were parked right beside each other. We all lived together in the same facility. We all ran around together. It was more or less like the one Crew Chief he took care of the two 0-1s and I took care of the T-28s.

LC: Now when you say you guys all lived together, did that include the pilots as well?

WE: Oh yeah, we all lived in the same house.

LC: And there was basically no distinction of rank were really operating there?

WE: No, Mr. Young and Mr. O’Neil and Mr. Eads, I can’t remember what the Crew Chiefs name was, the other Crew Chief. I mean there was no doubt that Mr. O’Neal; you know he was a Lieutenant Colonel. He was our boss. T.R. Young and I we used to go round and round about different things. He was an Air Force Academy graduate and he was very young and very aggressive and him and I, we used to have some issues but we worked it out. I mean one thing that I can remember, we had a T-28 take off out of there one time and blew a tire on takeoff and he was loaded and these guys didn’t want to give up, these Laotians were flying in by the way, down there, not Thai’s. He didn’t want to punch his ordinance off and come back and land safely. He insisted on keeping his ordinance on board. So then we tried to get him over to Ubon and land and he didn’t want to go over to Ubon so he decided to come back into Pakse, which we were about as well equipped to handle a crash landing with armament on board as I don’t know what. As we are preparing for this pilot to come back in why I’m telling T.R. Young, I’m telling him, “What we don’t want to do is…” He’s getting fire bottles and everything and I say, “The last thing we want to do if that brake’s hot is squirt CO2 on that hot brake. The whole damn thing will blow up.” He and I got into an argument about that. He and I got into it and as it worked out the plane landed and it kept one tire in the grass. He did come back with all his armament on but it was other than just landing in the grass and everybody being on edge, everything worked out ok. T.R. Young was a very, I remember a lot about T.R. Young because he was very aggressive. He would get very frustrated because it took so long, and that was one of the things that really was bad over there in
Laos is it took so long to validate a target and this truck convoys and all this stuff would move in and out and by the time you validated any movement or anything why it would take 24 hours, well crap the stuff would be gone. So he decided he was going to take 120-pound frag clusters and he was going to hang three of these little frag bombs on each wing of his 0-1. So he did that and he went out on his own. He dropped a few frag clusters on couple of the barges that they use between Laos and Cambodia that he knew were doing some bad stuff. He was a very aggressive guy. Of course the next time he flew through that river why he come back with quite a few bullet holes in his airplane because they were laying for him and certainly not happy with what he had done, meaning the bad guys.

LC: Yeah, they had gotten the idea.

WE: Anyway he got even with me in my argument over those brakes because I had the opportunity to fly with him a couple of days later. He kind of wrung me out. He got some altitude and then he shoved the stick forward and put it in a dive and my stomach went up in my head, it felt like, and he said, “How did you like that?” I said, “Not as much as you liked arguing about those brakes the other day.”

LC: So it was a little bit of tit for tat there.

WE: Yeah, he was really a warrior. I don’t know whatever happened to him.

LC: Where was he from, do you remember?

WE: No, I just remember he was an academy grad.

LC: I want to ask you about the….

WE: A lot of those guys have their stories in the book called *The Ravens* and that’s a great read for people. That is very true. I read that book and it really follows what went on over there.

LC: Can you say a little bit more about the locals who are on the base there? You said that you had some locals maybe working on T-28s with you or under you?

WE: Right and you got to remember it wasn’t a base it was the airport for Pakse. They were soldiers or aircraft mechanics but they were Laotian. They were very nice. I think in the slides you’ll probably see a picture of myself and a group of them together.

LC: What was their training like? Did you know anything about the back-story on these guys and where they had picked up their skills?
WE: Well they had went to training schools like over in Udorn and stuff like that. I don’t know whether any of them had went down in Vietnam or not where they had T-28s but I know they went over to Thailand. Of course I taught them what I knew as I went along.

LC: What was the language barrier like?

WE: Very Spartan to say the least.

LC: So how was that negotiated? How did you kind of communicate?

WE: Well I mean I was never big on foreign languages but you learn to communicate with the guys. They like to speak English and you try to speak Laotian because they thought more of you if you tried to participate with them, it wasn’t all one way.

LC: What about the pilots? You mentioned the guy who was flying on the day of the bad brakes episode or the blown tire episode that he was Laotian. Can you comment on those guys, how many were there at Pakse that were flying out of there?

WE: Well there was always one with an airplane. I would say three or four at any given time. I really don’t know where they stayed or anything. In my mind I can’t remember where they stayed, but they’d show up for their mission and we would get the planes ready and send them out on the missions, very dedicated. I don’t think you’ll find as you interview people, anybody that says a lot of bad about the Laotians. They were very loyal to us, very loyal to us overall.

LC: What was the thinking behind that particular pilot refusal to dump the ordnance when he was having trouble and may have had to make a forced landing?

WE: I think he felt by God weapons were hard to come by and if he was going to drop them he was going to drop them where it would do some good, you know what I mean?

LC: Sure. You mentioned that targets had to be validated, can you describe that process, how did that happen?

WE: All I know is like Young and O’Neal would go out and they would find truck convoys or they would find activity and they would have to go back in. I guess they would call a Flying Command Post out there. There was a 130 that was always on station. I can’t remember what, it would begin with an H. [Was possibly “Hillsboro”] I use to be
able to remember that pretty easy. It was an H I think and they would call it and then they would work it through the system and sometimes they could get back quicker than that. I remember one time I was flying with T.R. Young, it might have been that same mission, we were flying and he decided that he wanted to do some road cuts, in other words get some ordnance in on some roads. As you know talking to people before, those little guys over night could rebuild a road after it had been bombed out in the mountains and stuff like that. They were very ingenious when it comes to that. I remember that that didn’t take too long. There was some F-4s coming back off station, going back to Udorn or somewhere and they still had ordnance on board. You wouldn’t land with ordnance on board, you had to get rid of it someway so T.R. called in and there was some F-4s ahead and still had ordnance on board, coming back out of North Vietnam. We watched them cut the roads and that didn’t take too long but a lot of the convoys and stuff…just a lot of politics in it. It was very, very frustrating. It was like going two steps forward and taking three steps back sometimes.

LC: Your T-28s, which aircraft were you supporting at that time? Were your T-28s flying with or flying for?

WE: They were flying for the Laotians. In Pakse, see we used Laotian pilots in Pakse and Savannakhet and then we used Thai pilots up in Vientiane, which I’ll get into later.

LC: Can you describe the different weapons configurations ahead to go on to the different aircraft there at Pakse, do you know much about that?

WE: Well yeah, we loaded them. We had 250-pound low drags; 500 pound low drags, 50 caliber guns, CBU rails (Cluster Bomb Unit), some napalm, we had a bomb dump full of napalm. We had stuff leaking all over the place and everything else. It wasn’t the best of things but we loaded a lot of…what they would do is mix gasoline with the napalm jelly and that’s how, of course you’ve heard that before, that’s how they made the napalm. Then they would pour it in tanks. These tanks would set out in the hot sun and they would start weeping you know.

LC: Oh wow, I didn’t know about the leaking. What did you do when that happened? Did you try to spray it down or cover it up?
WE: You would just leave it alone. We kind of considered it condemned and then they probably flew some of that stuff too to get rid of it.

LC: Can you describe…?

WE: It was like a jelly.

LC: Yeah, exactly. Can you describe those tanks that that stuff was put into?

WE: I think they were using, down there they had old ferry tanks that they used.

LC: About how big were those?

WE: I would say and I’m reaching on this one, I would say probably diameter of maybe a couple foot to three foot. Length maybe twelve foot, does that sound right, I don’t know. You might see some of them in the slides, I don’t know. There was a bomb dump was right on top of the airplane. I mean it was very Spartan as I said before.

LC: Can you tell about loading the planes with the different weapons? When was that actually done, say an aircraft comes in from a mission, it has no ordnance on it, makes a clean landing and all, can you kind of walk us through what would happen up to the time when you would load new weapons onto that aircraft and have it prepared for the next mission?

WE: Well it would depend upon how fast you were going to turn them. If you were going to fly another mission that day of course you would bring them in and you would check their records, repair what needed to be repaired and refuel them and jam the weapons up and send them back out If they were going to stay on the ground all night, why you would not normally armor them until the next day. Very few times do I remember leaving airplanes on alert over night because you just weren’t secure, you know.

LC: Can you describe what the perimeter of the airport was like in terms of defense? You said that it was basically the municipal airport for Pakse. What kind of defenses did it have?

WE: I can’t really, at this time, remember even if they had a guard or not on the gate. I can’t remember any type of security at all. It was just a bare strip you know.

LC: How many times did you actually go up with FACs on their runs, do you remember?
WE: Oh I would say four or five times while I was down there. I mean I would go up to just give an extra set of eyes and just get bored and ask if I can go for a ride.

LC: Did you enjoy doing that?

WE: Oh I loved it.

LC: Really?

WE: Yeah because they would take me up to...we would stop at different places sometimes. There were those sites out there and we would land there once in a while and check some stuff. Of course the country was beautiful. It was just neat watching them work.

LC: Did you have much of a chance as you think back on your experience to really take in the beauty of the country? Was that something that continued to strike you?

WE: Oh yeah, of course some of the slides have aged over the years but you’ll see. We went out to waterfalls and stuff like that. Where we were in Pakse I mean poinsettias just grew wild all over the place, very beautiful country, very hot and humid.

LC: What was your impression of the Pathet Lao as an enemy? Did you get any of that from the pilots? Did they kind of talk about what the capabilities of this enemy that they were confronting were? Do you remember?

WE: Well needless to say they had no use for them. You’ve heard of General Vang Pao, I’ll get more into some of that if I can when we get up to Laos. Maybe those questions...they’ll fit in a little bit better. Down there they were very dedicated, very dedicated and willing to go after it. A lot of things went on, I’m hoping I am not getting ahead of myself, but it was a weird war. It was a weird war.

LC: No, it’s totally fine. Any old order, as things come to you, it’s great.

WE: It’s like I don’t want to forget to tell you this one. It might be an urban rumor or what do they call them?

LC: Urban legend.

WE: Urban legend, yeah. Air America supposedly and I had heard that from Air America people, they would drop rice and stuff sometimes to the enemy or knowing where the enemy could their hands on it because that would keep them in check. The Pathet Lao were in a situation where they were...third world countries you know food means a lot. They would stay in check and not advance if a lot of times if they had plenty
of food to eat and stuff like that. A lot of times the story went it was starvation and stuff like that. You know if you want to eat, you’ll go across the river and kill those guys.

LC: So you could kind of lure them in a particular direction.

WE: Right, lure them into just staying where they were, I’m talking about the bad guys.

LC: Sure, exactly. Just get them to actually hunker down and stay where they were.

WE: I mean it’s a whole different world. Here in the states we go out for hamburgers and hot dogs and all that stuff, but down there they would run around with a wad of sticky rice in their pocket and that was their sustenance you know.

LC: And that provided, in a way, a tactic that could be used.

WE: Like I say that could be an urban legend but I’ve got pretty close to the source.

LC: That doesn’t sound wrong to me. How long did you actually stay at Pakse?

WE: I’d say I was there probably no more than two months and then what happened was, I’d been two, two and a half months, what happened was, I’d say two months. Then I got called to go up to Vientiane and replace a Chief Master Sergeant that was going back to the States. Boy that was a thrill to me because I was just an E-5 and here I was going to go up and be the Line Chief at Vientiane. It was off to Vientiane and moving from two, three, four T-28s on station at any one time to moving up to where I’d have 12 or 14 lined up on any given morning.

LC: For somebody who didn’t understand the dynamics of the chain of command, can you explain why this was just a big boost for you to get this assignment?

WE: Well because of increased responsibility you know. Feeling that I had been rewarded for doing a good job. They knew I could cut it and replacing, that much rank spread, and replacing a guy that was that high in rank, was just a good shot in the arm.

LC: Can you describe the airfield at Vientiane when you got up there, which would have been I guess very late 1967?

WE: Right. Very active, a lot of hustle and bustle. Of course we were on one side of the runway and Air America was on the other side. Of course there was a terminal over there that Continental was operating out of. There was of course the air attaché was in
Vientiane and he had his and ambassador of course and they had their C-47 out there parked right by us, similar to a small town airport, well a small city airport here in the States.

LC: Can you estimate how many aircraft were based there at this time, altogether?

WE: No, I couldn’t because there was so much in and out of there traffic and stuff like that. I do know that I can tell you more about that when we get to talking about the T-28s. I know what I had.

LC: Were you still operating at this time with the air attaché ID card?

WE: Oh yes.

LC: When you say Air America was on one side, basically, of the field and you guys were on the other; when you say you guys did you mean the air attaché people who were actually from the US Air Force?

WE: Yes, and civilians too I’m sure. There were no uniforms floating around.

LC: At all?

WE: No. Sullivan was the ambassador. Every once in a while you would see him. I Gus Sonnenberg was the air attaché at the time. We all knew each other.

LC: You knew them all enough to kind of say hi to them and stuff when you come on the field?

WE: Oh sure.

LC: How often was the Ambassador or the air attaché in and out of there in that C-47, do you know?

WE: No, I can’t really remember that. I know that I’d probably seen Gus Sonnenberg, I probably seen him more than anybody because he would come out and he’d fly to Udorn once in while and stuff like that. One time I flew, I went on a small R&R (Rest and Relaxation) and I flew on that C-47 and we went up to Chiang Mai and we had the Princess at that time of Laos with us. We went up there.

LC: Ok, tell me about that R&R. Roughly when was that?

WE: Well let me try to recap a little bit. I’ll tell you a little bit about the mission first. I know I’m jumping ahead on you.

LC: No, that’s absolutely fine.
WE: If I don’t use it, I’ll lose it. So I go up to Vientiane and I immediately fall into the mission there. The mission was 12 to 15 T-28s would come up every morning; they would fly out of Thailand. They weren’t allowed to stay up there all night in Thailand or in Laos. They would be piloted by Laotian and Thai pilots, then what would also happen would be there would be a 123 fly up every morning and that would have a lot of the weapons guys and a lot of the support personnel. They would fly up every morning. So they would all fly up every morning and we called them the Little Girls, “Here comes the Little Girls.” [Called the T-28s Little Girls]

LC: Why did you call them that?
WE: Well that was the T-28, Little Girl, and that was just code name for them. Like nobody else would know what they were. The maintenance crews would fly up. There was me, another mechanic, an engine guy, a weapons guy and the communications guy, a doc, a Medic, and the guy that ran our operation and we would stay up there all the time and everybody would come up every morning and go home every night.

LC: Wow. That’s a lot of personnel.
WE: That mission was flown I guess mostly over Laos, close to the Plain of Jars and North Vietnam as I remember it. They had different targets around that they would hit and stuff like that. Sometimes they would fly one mission a day, sometimes we’d turn them three times, and sometimes we’d sit down. When they burned off the rice field it was hard to get out of there to fly missions. Still, we worked 12, 14 hours a day, seven days a week. Some of that was stand by during the rice burn-off season.

LC: The problem with the rice burn-off was what?
WE: It covered the targets.

LC: Oh really?
WE: They couldn’t see their targets. You got mountains and everything and it would create smoke, a smog type thing. So we were told.

LC: Would you say that it seemed to be the case that most of the target selection that the FAC and so forth were doing was reliant just on visual spotting?
WE: Well visual and what they could get there. We had different sites out there they were collecting data and stuff like that. There were some weird characters that passed through Vientiane going out in to the mountains and stuff like that to collect data.
LC: Do you remember any of them in particular, any of those guys?
WE: I can remember one guy that had a beard and stuff like that. He looked like that Rupert that was on *Survivor* here a couple weeks ago.
LC: The television program.
WE: Yeah, right. He was a mountain man looking guy and they would just go out there and blend in as much as an American can in with the guys and they run and you know they would try to collect data you know and come up with targets and stuff.
LC: By basically watching particular valleys or mountain passes or something like that?
WE: Sure.
LC: Do you know any of those guys’ names, do you remember any of those people who were going out there and who came through Vientiane?
WE: No, one use to stay with us once in a while but I can’t remember his name anymore. He was at one of the sites. These other guys tell you the history of that place, there was a site that got overrun somewhere in early ’68. It got overrun, it was a pretty sad thing and I can’t remember that guy’s name now but he got out of there and I think the got a Silver Star or something for that. I can’t remember what his name was anymore. I can see him in my mind but I can’t remember his name.
LC: Well it’s been many years now. The place that got overrun there, do you remember any details or did you hear anything about that?
WE: Well they just couldn’t get all of our guys out of there. These sites were up on these mountain tops and I guess the way the bad guys they come up the side of a mountain where it was kind of a cliff like thing and these guys didn’t expect it, they were in on top of them before they knew it.
LC: Do you know how many Americans…?
WE: I don’t know how many we lost but it got overrun. We lost that site.
LC: You had mentioned something about Vang Pao, what did you hear about him or did you ever see him?
WE: Well I don’t remember seeing him right now but I did know of him. I’m pretty sure I’ve seen him pass through there before I just can’t remember it now. He was the one who ate the enemy ear. He’d cut their ears off and eat and stuff like that. (Speaks
to another person) So I heard about that. He was a very aggressive warrior. The troops
seemed to really rally around him and stuff. We had a guy and again it’s in the book, The
*Raven* but Lay Lu was one of the pilots that championed the cause that flew out of
Vientiane. He was a Laotian pilot. He ended up getting killed over there. He’s kind of a
well-known pilot and warrior over there. What I remember about him was, he flew out
with a T-28 with a 750-pound bomb on it, which was unheard of at the time. He had a
certain target that he wanted to take care of and he insisted that he be allowed to fly with
that, so he went out with that.

LC: Really?

WE: Yeah.

LC: Do you mean that he had to sacrifice himself?

WE: Well he didn’t die on that mission but he ended up ultimately dying on a
mission.

LC: Do you remember that mission that he was lost?

WE: No, no I do not. I don’t remember whether it was when I was there or after I
left.

LC: In early ’68 you talked about the one post that underwent the surprise attack
and was quickly overrun. Did you see much…?

WE: Called Lima sites, as I remember.

LC: Ok. Do you remember increased activity around the time of the Tet Offensive
that you guys saw up there in Vientiane?

WE: No. Something else was going on during that Tet Offensive. I think our alert
heightened. Was that a part of that Gulf of Tonkin incident and stuff like that? Was that
all wrapped up in that?

LC: Yeah, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was quite a bit earlier though that was
when President Johnson was able to secure from the congress a resolution allowing US
troops to go into…

WE: Something happened while we were up, did the Koreans take….?

LC: Yes.

WE: Yeah the Koreans took it. I remember we went on high alert about that. They
took that boat right?
LC: Yes that’s right.
WE: Yeah that happened while I was up there.
LC: Yes. You guys, as a consequence of that were put on some degree of higher…

WE: Well we thought it was going to really heat up.
LC: Really?
WE: Yeah, but the planes that we had weren’t capable of handling anything of that magnitude, but it was just the whole world situation heating up.
LC: Seemed like there was a crisis point there.
WE: A couple things happened while I was up there that I would like to tell you about.
LC: Please do.
WE: Number one, on one of the mornings that the planes were coming up we had a, a commander had just taken over for these Thai pilots, the unit that was assigned to Udorn that these Thai pilots were in. He had just taken over and he was known to be a partier and known not to be too attentive to what he was doing. So he comes flying up with a T-28 one morning from Udorn after a night of partying and he radioed in and he couldn’t get his gear down. So he tooled around up there for a little bit up in the air and tried to get the gear down and decided on his own that he wasn’t going to try anymore, anything else and so he comes in on a belly landing on the runway. That was quite a site to behold. He got out of it ok.
LC: What aircraft was he in?
WE: That was a T-28 also. He climbed out of there like he was Buck Rogers you know, waving to everybody and everything else after he bellied this thing in. If I can ever find my black and whites, you’ll enjoy those pictures.
LC: You took photos of this?
WE: Yeah, well not of it, after. Because I was the poor sob that had to get the thing off the runway. As soon as I went over to the cockpit and looked in I seen the gear handle was still up. We got a couple of fork lifts and went out there and shoved the fork lifts under the airplane wings and lifted the airplane up and I went up and pulled the handle down and the gear fell right out of the wheel well. So I don’t know, I don’t know
what that all was about. We had to patch that one up and send it back to Udorn and of
course that required an engine change and everything else to get that out of there. Then
we lost one off the end of the runway one time. I couldn’t get nobody till about a mile,
well maybe a klick off the end of the runway and again the pilot got out ok. I think what
had happened to him was he had engine failure on the way in. So I called Udorn because
that was my headquarters and I said, “I’ve got this plane out there off the end of the
runway that’s crashed.” I said, “There’s nobody.” We called the air attaché and nobody’s
going to put guards on it that night. Of course the instrumentation and all that stuff, radios
and everything was still good in it. So the Chief down there at Udorn said, “Well you’re
the one up there.” He says, “Do what you get paid for and make a decision.” So here we
go. I got a truckload of Saigon weapons guys and everybody I could police up and we
drive down the road to this airplane that’s sitting out in the middle of this rice field and
about hour and half we had striped that damn airplane, maybe two hours, we had stripped
that airplane of everything that was worth while on it. We just left the shell there and we
went back and picked up the shell at a later date. That kind of made me feel good because
I was given the authority and that was a major decision to have to do that.

LC: Yes sir.

WE: Get the guys out there and go through that. That made me feel pretty good.

What you did up there, even though we ended coming out of there with our tail between
our legs, it really made you feel that you were doing something for God and country.

LC: Yes. Do you think you had an opportunity to exercise more responsibility say
under these circumstances at Vientiane then you would have if it had just been a regular
posting at your E-5 level?

WE: Oh no doubt about it. You know in a situation like that around an Air Force
base there would have been 18 Generals and you know everybody and their brother in the
decision on what to do. They would’ve chewed on that for days and I had about four
hours to get the job done.

LC: And Bill, why did you decide to do what you did, go out there and basically
excavate all the equipment? What made you decide to do that?

WE: Because I felt that that was the only way we were going to salvage any of
that property. That property was expensive and I felt that was the way to do it. Hindsight
being 20/20, I would of probably, as it was; we just cut the wires and pulled the
instruments out. Hindsight being 20/20 I made of tried to taken a little more care but the
main thing was that I saved the instrumentation, the radios and all that stuff.

LC: Did you have a concern that enemy observers were looking at that plane and
thinking that if you left that out there overnight they might come in and do the same thing
you did, which is…?

WE: Oh no doubt about it. So that was pretty neat. Like I said there was never a
dull moment up there. We would drive by, you were talking about the Pathet Lao earlier
and we would drive by, in fact you might see that in the slides, we would drive by the
Pathet Lao, they had an R&R Center there where they would bring their guys out to work
in their little compound there. We would go by them back and forth to work every
morning and every night we would go by them.

LC: Really?

WE: Yeah, they had an R&R Center there. Another urban legend that’s interesting
about Vientiane was I think the place was called, it was Buddhist type temple thing, but it
was in the middle of the square and it was called the Tat La Wan (Patuxai monument), I
may be mispronouncing, but I think that is what it was called. We called it the Vertical
Runway. We called it the Vertical Runway because urban legend was we had sent down,
God knows how many pounds or tons of concrete to build a runway somewhere and they
decided to take that concrete and cement and stuff and build this temple.

LC: How close was this to the airfield?

WE: I would say it was half way to ¾ a way between the airport and my house
where we stayed.

LC: So you went by it all the time?

WE: Yeah we drove right through, matter of fact one night the Medic and I had
had, this was around November/December time frame and the Medic and I had worked
very hard that day and we had a little too much liquid libation at the Air America club. So
the Medic was driving and we were in that square and a bicycle moved out in front of us
and the next thing I knew I could see the head light, the left headlight get real bright in
the dirt and the next thing I knew I had came to and he had done rolled that jeep with
both of us in there. Of course we had to be air evaced; he was trying to give me first aid.
Here he had a broken color bone being a Medic. I probably felt pretty vulnerable then because here I was a civilian kind of out there and there was nothing but a crowd of Laotians around us. We got tore up pretty bad. As it was, the Laotians being our allies they got me to a doctor and they air evaced me down to Udorn the next day and I stayed down there for a week. I had some pretty bad head abrasions and busted an eardrum and stuff like that. The Medic, he broke his collarbone.

LC: You busted your eardrum?
WE: Yes.
LC: Ouch.
WE: I mean I was messed up pretty bad. The jeep rolled over on top of us and then back on its wheels. That was just something that happened, but again like I said there was never a dull moment there.

LC: You were down then in Thailand getting, you were hospitalized I take it?
WE: Hospitalized for a while. Over night up in Vientiane and then they air evaced me down. I stayed in quarters. They sent me to quarters.
LC: Was there ever any doubt because of your injuries that you might not come back to Vientiane?
WE: In my mind there was. I really talked long and fast about that but they wanted me back up there. I had a pretty good record. It wasn’t something they broadcast around. Back then you took care of each other; you know what I’m saying?
LC: Sure, exactly.
WE: It was a night that we were doing something that probably shouldn’t have done that much of and we got healed up and went back to work.
LC: Yeah, that stuff happens.
WE: Right, I mean there was an Air America guy that, this was on my first tour over there, an Air America guy he got on an airplane. We were flying to get flying time one day and he had to make a jump or he wasn’t going to get his jump pay for that month. Hell he had been in a damn bad motorcycle accident the night before. Had his arm in a cast and everything. We had to help him into the parachute so he could make his jump and here he had his arm in a cast. That was the way it was over there.
LC: Can you describe the atmosphere in the Air America bar? You said you had
gone over there once in a while. For somebody who didn’t really have a clue about Air
America or the kinds of guys that work there, how would you describe that?
WE: Just a great bunch of guys, straight up guys. There were other people that
ventured there too but the Air America guys were just a great bunch of guys. The
Continental guys were. We all were a great bunch of guys. You understand what I am
saying.
LC: Absolutely.
WE: Because we were just very cohesive. They’d need us, we’d need them and
that was just the way it was.
LC: Did you have a sense of a shared mission that you were doing something
important?
WE: Oh yes. I’m sure those guys I mean those guys flew into harm’s way a lot
more than I ever did. Those guys were in harm’s way all the time. They were in and out
of those little ole places.
LC: What kinds of aircraft were those guys flying?
WE: 123s, C-46s, Pilatus Porters, Goonie Birds, I guess I said that.
LC: And primarily were they flying supply missions up to these outposts that
were…?
WE: And supply, resupply, move some troops around once in a while, stuff like
that.
LC: What were the supplies coming into Vientiane? Were those Air America
flights in big aircraft bringing things into Vientiane?
WE: You know, I don’t remember. I just know that I went to the warehouses and I
just remember bags and bags and bags and bags of rice with the handshake that said
USA. I would imagine that a lot of that stuff comes in by truck and by aircraft. I
remember more of the in country activities then what was coming in and going out.
LC: Right. Were you familiar with any losses that happened to any of the flyers
while you were there?
WE: Yes, we lost some Thai pilots while I was there. I can’t remember what their
mission was, but what happened was, and we used to get on them about this. We told
them, “Be smart and don’t use your radios unless you have to so they can’t get a fix on you, but by God if you know your buddy is going to get into trouble, use your radio.” One guy let two of his buddies fly right into the side of a mountain one day.

LC: Just because he didn’t want to use the radio?

WE: Well because he was trying to maintain radio silence. They got lost in the cloud. He was able to make it out of there and he knew they were in harm’s way. He didn’t either didn’t call them or by the time he thought to call him they didn’t have a chance. We felt if he would’ve called them, he may have been able to save those two flyers.

LC: How did that story come to you, do you remember? How did you find out about that?

WE: I got less airplanes back off that mission. Then so, needless to say, he went in and told Mr. Holden, yeah that was his name, Holden. We called him Mr. Holden. Mr. Holden was our Station Chief.

LC: Was that H-O-L-D-E-N?

WE: Yeah I am pretty sure it was Holden.

LC: So the Thai pilot went in and told him what happened.

WE: Right.

LC: Were there any American flyers who didn’t come back that you know of?

WE: First time over, and I think I told you about that already. That first tour I was over there out of Udorn we lost a couple. No, I don’t remember too much about Air America losing anybody I mean I’m sure they did. I don’t remember a whole lot about that.

LC: What about your R&R? At what point did that come? Do you remember what time it was, what time frame that was?

WE: Let me interject something else right quick before I forget it and that is I was there when the first POWs (Prisoner of War) came back from North Vietnam. They came within about 25 foot of where I was but we couldn’t open the door and look out and see them because he had to maintain quiet where we were. That was sometime in the winter of ’67,’68 there. They negotiated the release, I think there was three guys that got to come out, three Americans that got to come out of North Vietnam prisons and I was in
the control room helping work the radios and helping do some things like that when they
went up and got those guys in North Vietnam and brought them back out. So that was an
evening I remember. They brought them out, they got off an aircraft, and I can’t
remember what type it was. It’s a civilian plane and it looks like a B-17 type thing, or a
B-17, but its design is similar, it’s a Boeing type aircraft.

LC: But it had civilian markings.

WE: Yeah and then they put them on the C-47 and I guess they flew them on
down to Udorn. I was there for that.

LC: Did you actually see those guys?

WE: No, like I said they made us stay inside. They switched them right out there
yeah.

LC: Yeah, can you describe your feelings?

WE: Oh great. Great to see us to be able to get some of our guys back. I think
they may have not been on missions out of Udorn or Laos, they may have been flying out
of Vietnam or something but they had got shot down up there.

LC: I was just going to ask what service they were from, which arm of the
service?

WE: No. They were probably in the Navy or Air Force. I don’t think no Marines
were flying up there, I don’t think.

LC: I think you’re right. That night that that happened, what was the mood? Did
everybody go out and have a beer or do you remember?

WE: We felt pretty good about it. If there was beer to be had we probably had
one. Part of the responsibility of that 123 that came up everyday was on Mondays they
would bring or beer ration up for the week. Every Monday they would bring 40 cases up,
40 cases of beer.

LC: You’re kidding, that’s a lot of beer.

WE: Well when we were in the stand by and stuff like that we were allowed to
drink, as long as we didn’t get crazy when waiting around.

LC: Even when you were on call, as it were, you could have a beer or two that
was the deal?

WE: Yeah, actually safer than the water, that’s the way they felt.
LC: I’m sure that’s right. Do you remember much about what you were eating? How was the food?
WE: Well we ate on the economy a lot. We got separate rations, extra money to, I’m sorry. Hang on; the Assistant Principal is talking back there over the intercom. What did you say again? I’m sorry.
LC: I was just asking about the food and whether you remember much about…
WE: We ate on the economy a lot. Then we ate some at the house. The maids would fix us meals once in a while and stuff like that but we ate on the economy. There was an airport restaurant there that we ate quite a bit at. Of course we would go down to Udorn every once in a while and spend the night, run around down there.
LC: Now at your house you had local women who were working in the house. Did you have any kind of relationship with any of these women such that you would know their name or ask them to get things for you or anything like that?
WE: No, they took care of us. It’s been a lot of years. The one that we worked, I mean she just took good care of us you know, she cleaned house and took care of it, sometimes she’d fix dishes for us and stuff like that.
LC: Really. Did she do laundry?
WE: Yes.
LC: And how was she paid?
WE: We paid her. One person in the house collected from everybody.
LC: And whoever that was would just kind of take care of it.
WE: Right.
LC: Did you get good value for your money do you think?
WE: Oh yeah. They were good people. They were third world country people in ways but they took good care of us.
LC: In general you had pretty high opinion of the Laos who were our allies.
WE: Them and Thais, I thought a lot of. I think the South Vietnamese could’ve put a little bit more effort into it at times.
LC: Bill did you get over to South Vietnam at all?
WE: Well that first period of time I was telling you about when I was in and out of there before, but no, not during this period of time.
LC: This time you did not.

WE: No ma’am.

LC: But you did get up to Chiang Mai at one point.

WE: Yes.

LC: Ok. What happened during that R&R? You said you flew up there on the, was it the C-47?

WE: Yeah, the air attaché’s, the Ambassador’s C-47 I guess or air attaché. We went up there and spent a long weekend up there and all of us got together, the air attaché, and everybody that went up there. We all rented motorcycles and we rode motorcycles and motor scooters up in the mountains.

LC: Really.

WE: Yeah and just got to enjoy that and come back down and shop.

LC: Did you take your camera with you?

WE: Yes I think you’ll see some slides of that.

LC: Ok, super. Did you mention that there was a member of the royal family that went up there too?

WE: Yes, the princess. You’ll see her picture in there too.

LC: Ok. What were the circumstances under which she went up there on this trip? Did you find out or know anything about that?

WE: I think she went up there for goodwill, some sort of a goodwill thing. I can’t remember exactly what it was. I was told and I since forgot. I don’t know whither she up just for relaxation or if she went up to meet somebody or what. They were asking us if we wanted to go but I guess she was ok with taking some people up there so we went along. We certainly went different ways once we got up.

LC: Do you remember her name?

WE: No ma’am.

LC: What was your impression of her? You were on the plane with her.

WE: Very nice, very down to earth. Very pleasant, just smiled and said hello to her and stuff like that.

LC: Did she speak English?

WE: Can’t remember. I’m sure that she knew some English.
LC: Probably, yeah. Did you ever come across or see anyone else either in the royal family or in the government that you remember?

WE: No ma’am.

LC: I know you mentioned Vang Pao and that he was probably through the…

WE: Yes I know. I probably met him and why it don’t stick in my mind at this point, I don’t know because he came through there all the time. His headquarters were up at one of the Lima sites and I’d have to look at the map to see one of the Lima sites up there. He stayed up in that area most of the time. My boss, Mr. Holden, he flew up there and saw him every once in a while.

LC: What was Mr. Holden’s rank actually, do you know?

WE: A Major as I remember.

LC: You reported to him?

WE: Yes.

LC: His assignment and your assignment was in essence do you know if what unit…

WE: He ran that whole T-28 mission and some other aircraft support and stuff like that.

LC: Bill, I think you might have mentioned in your questionnaire that at some point you might have gone out on a civic action run or a MEDCAP (Medical Civil Action Program) run of some kind.

WE: Right, I did some of that in Thailand in my first tour, did some civic action stuff.

LC: But you didn’t do anything like that in Laos?

WE: Not that I can remember right now. If I put it in there, I remembered it then but it slipped my mind. In Sakon Nakhon, Thailand I did that and I think I did that before, that was on that same tour of duty, but I did that before I went over to Laos.

LC: I see. Do you remember going out on one of those missions?

WE: Oh yeah. I went out with the doc, not the same doc that rolled the jeep over on me.

LC: A different guy.
WE: Yeah I went out with him. Lined people up, as they would come, and he’d
treat them as best he could and people would come for different, you know he was
limited on what he could do but he could do what he could do. I’d help him pass
medicine and just help him. Done it a couple times.
LC: So it was basically like a village sick call type thing.
WE: Yeah, there you go.
LC: Can you describe actually the city of Vientiane while you were there in ’67,
’68?
WE: Well bustling city. A lot going on, a lot of activity seemed to be a thriving
city, people always on the go doing something.
LC: Did you see a lot of Americans there who were…?
WE: No, not really.
LC: Not really. Did you ever go to the US Embassy?
WE: Yes, I think that was part of the complex that we processed in at. Seems like
to me that that embassy ground, I can’t remember anything stately or anything like that
right now. Now it may have been, but I remember it being low buildings and stuff like
that.
LC: What kind of cars were on the roads, do you remember?
WE: Oh those little Fiats and stuff like that, you know little stuff.
LC: French cars?
WE: Yeah there was RenaulTs; there was a lot of RenaulTs over there.
LC: Do you have any other impressions of Vientiane that come to mind now?
WE: Not really. I can remember there was a strip of clubs that we went to at
night. The nightlife was there but it was Spartan. I do remember the Peace Corps, they
would hang out in this one bar and you would walk by and it would reek of marijuana, I
remember.
LC: Really.
WE: Yeah, and that sticks out. We even ventured in there one night but right
away we knew it was no place for GIs to be.
LC: Why was that?
WE: Well because you were forbidden to be around that stuff.
LC: Oh, ok, around the drugs and stuff.
WE: They had a very much more liberal lifestyle than what we were allowed. To
be quite frank it really wasn’t what I wanted to mess with. Now I could drink with the
best of them but I didn’t want to get into that stuff.
LC: Was there quite a bit of kind of drug availability? That’s one thing that comes
up in the literature about Laos, and particularly in Vientiane, that it was a port for moving
opium around and that kind of stuff. Did you ever hear or see any of that?
WE: If there was, I didn’t see it. I just remember the marijuana being abundant in
that one area. Don’t get me wrong; I heard there was a lot of trafficking through there.
The marijuana was definitely there.
LC: But you didn’t see anything that made you think that harder drugs were
moving around?
WE: No, not at all. I mean those kids might have been messing with that stuff. It’s
kind of weird how we set our priorities and values of like I say I’ll drink beer with the
best of them but I just didn’t want to mess with that stuff.
LC: That was just a different place and you weren’t going there.
WE: That’s right.
LC: I’m with you. Did you have any other impressions of our Laotian allies that
you could share, either civilians that you might have seen at the airfield or the pilots that
were there?
WE: Well, again, I felt they were very dedicated. I mean they were limited on
what they had to use, what we gave them. They were limited in their, how do I want to
say it, the desire was there, the capability wasn’t always there. I remember one particular,
I might interject this, I remember one flight I flew on and this might have been in my first
tour over there. The guy was trying to train, the instructor pilot, who was American, was
trying to train Laotian pilots to fly this C-47 and we were on this C-47 again to get time
in, to get flying time in. As I told you earlier, the last interview, I was on flying status so
when those KB-50s got grounded to keep getting flight pay I had to fly four hours a
month. He had this stick with him and those guys would be trying to fly that airplane and
if they did something wrong he would whack them on the knuckles with this stick! He’d
whack these Laotian pilots on the knuckles with this stick and say, “No, you don’t do it that way.” That’s the way it was.

LC: That got the message across.

WE: The desire was there, God bless their hearts. The Thais and the Laotians I just felt very much allegiance to them. I have a ring that was given to me by the Thai pilots. We had to pay for the gold and stuff like that but they would come up to you and say, “We’d like you to become one of us in this net and we’d like you to get this ring.” This ring was made by the, this ring, it’s a beautiful ring. Unfortunately it’s too soft of gold to wear all the time but it’s supposed to be made by the jeweler that makes all the Prince of Thailand’s jewelry. It’s 18-karat gold and it’s got American colors on it and it’s got a diamond in it and it says, “Anytime, anyplace,” which was kind of the motto up there.

LC: Was that an honor?

WE: Oh sure. I wear a bracelet now that’s got the Laotian elephants on it; you know the triple headed elephants, Laotian symbol. I still wear it; I have that on right now. I wear that all the time.

LC: Really?

WE: Yes.

LC: Wow, that sounds a lot about how you felt about what you were doing and that you were apart of something…

WE: I didn’t come back with my tail tucked between by legs…

LC: Apparently not. When did you actually leave Vientiane?

WE: May of ’68.

LC: And where did you go?

WE: Went back to Udorn to process out and then we ended up at Andrews Air Force Base.

LC: What were your feelings on leaving the theatre?

WE: Well certainly I wanted to go home and be with my family. I was ready to go home. By then we had started getting the word that we were kind of spinning our wheels in some of that stuff. That wasn’t the happiest feeling in the world.

LC: By spinning our wheels, do you mean American policy?

WE: Right, getting bogged down.
LC: What was your impression of the Johnson Administration’s management of the war at that point?

WE: Well you know being over there you didn’t have a lot to draw from.

LC: Right, you had limited information.

WE: You got that exactly right. You had limited, especially being up there in Laos. You didn’t get a bunch of papers and stuff like that. I think there was a French paper up there that had some, but it was kind of slanted anyway.

LC: Ok, slanted toward…?

WE: Toward anti-American.

LC: Ok, right. When you got back to Andrews, did you have time to think about and have more information about what the US was doing and how generally the war, the broader war was going?

WE: Yeah, it was evident that we were getting bogged down. Of course I hit Andrews about the time there was a lot of demonstrations in Washington DC. I was stationed there when they had the line of buses bumper to bumper around the White House. I was on the ramp the night that the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Airborne landed at Andrews to go down to set up a tent city at Bolling Air Force Base. There was no doubt that the public opinion was such that we weren’t, it was going to take something, some sort of a catastrophic event or something to change the tide toward being a pro that war versus anti that war.

LC: So you got to Andrews would it be in May or June of 1968?

WE: Oh I probably took 30 days leave so probably June, July time frame in there.

LC: The 82\textsuperscript{nd} Airborne deployed to Bolling, do you know what the circumstances were, the reasons for that?

WE: Yeah there was a big demonstration. I can’t remember what demonstration it was but it was a big massive thing. They parked city buses bumper to bumper around the White House and the Capital and everything, I don’t know. I was working at the other end of the flight line there and I was working the night shift and I just know that they ran a bunch of them in there.

LC: A lot of activity that night.
WE: A lot of activity. They had a 130 up there that had a gun ship, I guess it was, had a bunch of lights on it and stuff like that. It might not have been a gun ship but it had those high intensity search lights and stuff on it.

LC: Do you remember where you were when you found out that Robert Kennedy had been shot? Were you on leave or were you already at Andrews, do you remember?

WE: No, I just remember hearing about it. I remember shortly there after going up to his grave and seeing that solitary cross there.

LC: Did you go up and visit it?

WE: Yes.

LC: On your own?

WE: Well I went with the family.

LC: Ok. Did you have some particular feelings about Robert Kennedy that prompted that trip?

WE: No, actually we went up there to see John’s and his you know. I remember I think it was more to go to Arlington cemetery but I wanted to make sure I saw Robert’s because he has passed away so recently.

LC: That summer of 1968 anti-war protests were really mounting. Did you see any of those protests in Washington or around there? Or not?

WE: Only on the film or only on the news. I knew what was going on. The only thing that sticks out in my mind about my tour at that point was also there was some racial strife going on in Resurrection City. We did drive by and see Resurrection City, which was in that same window of time. I got there I like July of ’68 and I left on recruiting duty in ’70, around November of ’70. What would that put me in there, what, a little over two years? Two and a half years, something like that.

LC: What was Resurrection City for somebody who didn’t know?

WE: Resurrection City was a city that the African Americans, some shanties and stuff like that. They built kind of an encampment that they built on the Mall in Washington DC.

LC: And you did actually see that.

WE: Yes I did and I think you’ll see slides on that, well you might not see slides on that because I didn’t send you no slides of once I got back to the States.
LC: Can you send us some slides? We can talk about that later if you want to.
WE: Yeah, let’s talk about that later.
LC: Ok. The assignment to Cincinnati…
WE: Hey don’t forget, I know we’re on tape right now but don’t forget before we
break today I want to get, if you have a point of contact for World War II Archive, if you
could give that to me. I have somebody that I want to get involved in that.
LC: Ok, sure I can help you.
WE: Ok, thank you.
LC: No problem. You went out to Cincinnati as a recruiter, can you describe that
transition? Was that something that you wanted to do and looked forward to doing?
Getting off the flight line and…?
WE: In a way I did. Part of the thrust of that was I had already seen the
handwriting on the wall the way that war was going and they were turning around
mechanics and weapons guys and stuff like that. They were turning them around and
sending them back to Vietnam only after being in the States 90 days. I had started off in
Andrews as a flight mechanic and I had flew for a little while and then I got put back on
the ground and actually I volunteered to go back on the ground because I got tired of
flying and I worked on the night shift. There is a lot of things going on at Andrews and
there is a lot of things. I knew I was getting ripe to go back to Vietnam again and could
just see where it was going. That was probably one of the few selfish moves I’ve ever
made in my Air Force career and not only was it selfish but it was almost stagnated my
career by volunteering and going on recruiting duty because I did get to go but they and
to get three or four wavers for me to go because I was due to go back overseas. So to say
the least I went into recruiting duty with mixed emotions.
LC: You just did not want to go back to the Southeast Asia theatre?
WE: No, because we weren’t winning that puppy.
LC: And you had been there twice now at this point.
WE: Yes, I thought I had made a substantial contribution to the cause.
LC: Now when you say you think it might have kind of stymied your progress.
That was a trade off that you were willing to make though?
WE: Yes.
LC: I’m sure your wife was happy for you to stay.
WE: Yes.
LC: Where did you actually live in Cincinnati?
WE: We lived in a suburb called Amelia, Ohio.
LC: I know where that is.
WE: Do you really?
LC: I do. I’ve spent a lot of time in Cincinnati actually; it’s a great town.
WE: Sure is. You know where I worked then, I started off working at Pleasant Ridge, it’s a recruiting office there. I don’t know whether that’s even still there anymore and then about a year after that they moved me down to the AFEES, which is now called MEPS, moved down to the AFEES there at the Federal Building.
LC: So you were right downtown then at the end of your tour there as it were.
WE: Yes.
LC: And you stayed in Cincinnati for about six years or so?
WE: Five and a half years.
LC: Can you tell me what it was like to try to recruit during the early 1970s when the war in Southeast Asia is still going on even though we are heading toward devolution of US involvement?
WE: Well we were the least of the evils being Air Force and so we had some pretty good selling points there. Number one if you get drafted chances are you’re going to end up being a foot soldier in the Army or the Marine Corps. You join the Air Force and for the most part you’ll stay out of the direct fire for the most part. I didn’t BS and tell a bunch of lies and bull crap, I told people the truth. Overall we were the best out there that was available so it wasn’t an easy sell but it wasn’t that hard of a sell either.
LC: Right, because probably some of your young men that were walking in were you know facing draft and they were there to find if there was some other way to serve rather than going into infantry.
WE: Exactly, and the other side of the coin was, believe it or not there was still a few patriots out there. There were still people coming in that wanted to do something for their country.
LC: Do you remember any of those young men particularly?
WE: No, not in particular from anybody else. I mean I knew kids that were really
desirous of going in and we would help them all we could. Never really followed up on
them because we usually had to ship them out. When I moved down to processing, well
you’ve seen my signature probably on some of the documents you got that I sent you. My
signature is just a squiggle. It used to be legible before I went into recruiting. After you
get up to that AFEES and start signing your name 50, 60 times a day, why…

LC: It kind of gets a little less ornate.

WE: Exactly. I probably didn’t answer your question. Got off on a rabbit trail.

(Laughter)

LC: That’s fine. It’s very interesting because I think the same thing has happened
to me in what I was thinking about. You then went to Rickenbacker, is that right?

WE: Yes.

LC: Can you describe what you did there? This would have been 1976.

WE: Well they wanted me to go back in aircraft maintenance but I had been away
from airplanes for so long that I went down and talked to them. They were going to make
me a supervisor because as I left recruiting service I got Master Sergeant, see that’s what
I was telling you about recruiting service. I was a six year Tech Sergeant, which was
almost unheard of, but then I waited seven years to put on Master. Part of that was
because I got into recruiting service.

LC: Which is not the fast track to…?

WE: No, it’s not a fast track but it’s a very, I’m sorry, it’s a thankless job. The
reward is when the guys come back and say, “Hey, thanks Sarg for putting me straight
and telling me the truth,” and stuff like that. Sales are sales no matter where you go. I was
the best son of a gun in the world at the end of the month when I had my quota made but
I was a worst son of a bitch in the world the next day until I got my quota made for the
next month.

LC: And what you’ve done before doesn’t help.

WE: And then to processing, when I moved into processing I was a book guy, I
went by the book and they were all about production and I was all about going by the
book. These recruiters, and I’m not dumping on them, this is just the facts of life. They
would bring their kids down there early in the morning to ship and then they would go off
drinking and partying or God knows what somewhere. Come back at 3:30 in the
afternoon, wanting to know why their kid didn’t ship and I’d say, “Well look, you got to
got a police check.” “Well why didn’t you take care of it?” “Because that’s your job. Let
me tell you something else, if you’re going to try to fraud a kid into the Air Force you
cover it up good enough where I don’t catch it. If I catch it, he’s not going nowhere.”

LC: That’s some pretty heavy ground to be on.

WE: Well it’s pretty heavy ground to be on and it’s not a favorable stance to take
when they’re pushing for production. The deal was you’re either going to get your, I’d
just soon have every recruiter pissed off at me as having a supervisor from somewhere
coming after me because we put a kid in we shouldn’t have.

LC: Actually I want to ask you about another piece of it. Was it helpful to you in
someway to have been over in Southeast Asia while you were recruiting and the
possibility was that some of the guys that you were bringing in, who actually cleared all
the hurdles, would be going over there, did you talk about your experiences at all with
these young men and kind of clue them a little bit?

WE: I mean they knew it was going on and they knew that they could end up in
harm’s way. I told them, “Hey I went over and I made it ok.” I wasn’t going to paint them
no big flowery picture about it. It was one of those types of assignments that’s neat for
some people and not neat for other people. Certainly my breadth of experience were, well
even today, I feel that my breadth of experience helps me a tremendous amount as yours
does, all the experiences you’ve listened to. I mean you can draw from it and you have a
wider, you know your peripheral vision when it comes to thoughts, making decisions on
different things and stuff like that, it’s so much broader versus somebody who has been in
Podunk, Iowa for all their life and they got tunnel vision, it’s black or white. Well you
and I both know that it’s not necessary always black and white.

LC: Usually no.

WE: That’s right.

LC: You were later on posted over to Turkey. How did that come about?

WE: Just was due after five and a half years in recruiting service and then two
years at Rickenbacker I was ripe for another tour.

LC: In an overseas posting?
WE: Overseas tour, yeah. So I went with my wife and we loaded up and away we went. I was the 1st Sergeant; well that’s what happened at Rickenbacker. At Rickenbacker, I didn’t finish my story. I left aircraft maintenance I felt it was time for a change and went into becoming a 1st Sergeant. A 1st Sergeant in the Air Force is a little bit different than 1st Sergeant in the Army. 1st Sergeant in the Air Force is more of a representative of the commander to the enlisted people and the young officers and just reverses that going back up, you know, to the commander.

LC: So you’re kind of a voice for…

WE: Right and take care of people business.

LC: Ok. That came to you while you were at Rickenbacker?

WE: Yes, I cross-trained into that. I started working on the rest of my college degree, went on over to Turkey, was the 1st Sergeant there. We were in Ankara, Turkey. Another third world country with a lot of problems you know.

LC: And you went over there in 1978, is that right?

WE: Yes ma’am.

LC: What was your billet like over there? Where did you stay since you had the family?

WE: We lived in an apartment house. A big spacious, almost all glass wall type of apartment house, just beautiful. The only thing is in the middle of winter, those glass walls, those big glass panels, if you don’t have heat in your apartment can get pretty cold and that was a big problem over there, was electricity and heat. We had troubles with that because of their economy. They bought their power from Bulgaria so you lost a couple hours each day because of power outages, scheduled power outages and then heat was a problem because it was hard getting coal in for fuel because of the black market.

LC: Because of the black market?

WE: Yeah because their money wasn’t worth anything. If you look at their money today, if you ever look at the Turkish/Lira exchange rate today, well you go back to when I was over there. When I got there, it was 25 to 1 and you look at the exchange rate today, it’s phenomenal.

LC: Yes, hyperinflation practically.

WE: Yes, exactly.
LC: What exactly was your job?

WE: 1st Sergeant. I was the 1st Sergeant for the headquarters TUSLOG (The United States Logistics Group) over there.

LC: So an average day looked like what?

WE: Average day would be get up, drive into work or catch the bus into work, paperwork, personnel issues, go to the gym and beat the racket ball around for an hour and a half or so, sit in the sauna, come back out and more personnel issues. Working issues for people that were living on the station and the people who were living downtown. Working emergency leave, processing people in, just normal 1st Sergeant type stuff.

LC: You were pretty much away from the aircraft line by this point.

WE: Yes, definitely.

LC: Were you flying at all?

WE: No. I got to fly a couple of times you know just coming back to the States to pick up a prisoner one time and then I was selected for 1st Sergeant of the Year. I got to go to Spain for competition over there, different things like that.

LC: Wow. That was quite an honor.

WE: Well, yeah it was but you got to remember there wasn’t very many 1st Sergeants in Turkey. (Laughter)

LC: So the competition wasn’t that stiff, huh? Is that what you’re telling me?

WE: That’s right. When you’re working not too many doors down from a Major General. Not to sound full of myself but I was a pretty damn good 1st Sergeant. I took care of the people.

LC: Were you really at this point enjoying the administrative life?

WE: Oh, very much so.

LC: Really?

WE: Very much so.

LC: Wow, because that’s such a change from what you had been doing. From what you did when you decided to make the Air Force your career, this really wasn’t…

WE: I was always a people person and about my people. It was the right job for the right time. Plus then I kept pursuing my college career and ultimately when I got
back, later on when I got back to the States I got my degree at Bolling. I made Chief and I
got to self-actualize a lot, you know.

LC: Your first tour in Turkey was a two year stint, is that right?
WE: Yes.

LC: How did your family enjoy being over there?
WE: Loved it. I took them to Egypt. I took them to Greece. Well I took my wife
to Greece. Took my wife to Cyprus. I took the whole family to Egypt. Went through the
middle of Beirut when all that crap was going on.

LC: Did you really? Wow.
WE: Yeah. Of course there was a lot that went on in Turkey. There was a lot of
political unrest in Turkey too. You just accepted it. The American people are very
resilient when it comes to stuff like that.

LC: Did you ever feel yourself in danger in Ankara when you were moving back
and forth from the base to your house?
WE: Not really.

LC: You left there and went to Nebraska…?
WE: You could become paranoid. You could be paranoid over there and just drive
yourself nuts, lock yourself up. You know there was people over there that never went
out, never did anything.

LC: Well the late 70’s there was a lot going on in the Middle East that was no
good for America.
WE: I was there when Iran took it [the Embassy] over. We were there when that
took place.

LC: Did that affect operations on your base that you know of?
WE: Oh we heightened the alert. We were a headquarters TUSLOG type thing so
we just went…we didn’t have no aircraft there or anything so the General got up. General
Burns was his name, he got up and called us all in and said, “If there was anyway we can
help to get those people out of there, we’ll do it.” “Yes sir.”

LC: You came back to the states but then went back to Turkey again?
WE: Yes. I went to Omaha, had a real nice job out in Omaha but let me tell you
something if you’ve ever been to Omaha or not, but Omaha is a beautiful city and there’s
a lot to do within in the city but I’ll tell you what, it’s cornfields all the way around it.
Me, being an east coast boy, my wife being an east coast girl, we enjoyed Omaha for the
eight months we were there but we were glad to get out of there. Had a great job, I had
everything going for me but I just did not like that area.

LC: There wasn’t really a lot to entertain you off base.

WE: Well not so much that but she wanted to come back and visit her parents and
my parents were in Ohio and hers were in Virginia, it was 20 some hours straight driving
to get back. If you flew it was almost cost prohibitive because there is no deals flying out
of those places.

LC: It’s not really on the way to anywhere, which is what they say about Lubbock
too. I want to ask you about some events in the 1970s that you no doubt were aware of
and I wondered if you had any reactions to them. Particularity I’m thinking about the fall
of Saigon in 1975 and the true end to US involvement out there. Do you remember that?

WE: All I can remember is those guys climbing up on the building and the
choppers landing on top of the building, people trying to get through the gates and stuff
like that. I remember films of them shoving airplanes off into the sea. I remember about
the C-5, the doors blew out the back of it and they lost all those little kids. That to me was
probably the saddest thing. I guess that’s even sad to me right now because I think about
that because I said, “Damn it, we couldn’t even get out of there gracefully.”

LC: Yeah I wondered how you felt about the…

WE: That C-5 incident, as I reflect back on it, probably very emotional as far as
we just couldn’t get out of there clean. You know what I mean?

LC: That was a tragedy really, the crash with all the children and the nurses
aboard and of course the crew. Did you have an opportunity then or subsequently to think
back about what the US was actually doing over there and form an opinion and if you did
could you talk about that for a minute?

WE: Well I feel that we were there for a reason. See I was always taught that the
reason we were there was because we did not want the Communists to control the Rice
Bowl. Of course that area is all big rice growing over there, that whole area and to the
best of my knowledge it was called the Rice Bowl. I don’t know whether it still is or not.
That was one of the things that we were always taught. We wanted to keep that whole
area away from the Communists because if they controlled the Rice Bowl; they
controlled that part of the world. So I had no ill feelings about why we were there. With
that in mind, I guess one could surmise and second-guess everything you know
everybody’s decision like they say well Kennedy was going to pull out and this was
going to happen and that was going to happen, well, who knows? The bottom line was
the reason for being there was not all that bad in my book, but the way we went about it
was just not smart at all. When you’re a warrior in a war you have to be given the
authority to carry out that war in the best and quickest way possible to minimize your
loses and to set the enemy back and we did not do that over there.

LC: And we didn’t do it because why? Do you know?

WE: I can only say that the war moved from the battlefield into the capital
building. It moved from there and guys and gals were making decisions that weren’t in
the trenches and had lost [sight of it] all. They were more interested in their political
outcome than they were in resolving that issue in a very positive way over there. There is
no doubt in my mind we could have won that. If anything else we could of blew a DMZ
(Demilitarized Zone) across Vietnam to Gulf of Tonkin and made it a mile wide or two
miles wide, and dared anybody to come across, fill it with water or something.

LC: Yes sir. I mean all those technical things were possible and they just simply
weren’t done.

WE: They just got bogged down and of course when they started getting bogged
down well hell the morale of our forces went down and everything else. I feel sorry for
the ground troops. I don’t like to hear them cry in their beer, you know a lot of them still
running around crying in their beer, woe is me and that was a bad time and that ruined
my life and all of that. I know hundreds of people that I’ve met since then and pulled
themselves up by their boot straps and got on with their lives; but I can not fault them for
their morale being low in what they were having to endure versus what was being
decided in Washington DC.

LC: Do you think that the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a real thing or do
you think it’s kind of blown up and become kind of an excuse? Do you have a feeling
about that?
WE: I would say a mixture of both if that makes sense. I would say some have used it for an excuse; some probably have a bonafide reason. I can’t even begin to imagine what it’s like to live in the swamps and pull leeches off of you day in and day out. To have to call your aircraft in right on top of you to hopefully knock the enemy back and save your own asses. I would say there is a degree of validity to it but there is a lot of people running around. We know of one guy and I’m not going to drop his name but he never went to Vietnam and he runs around like he is a Vietnam vet, give me a break. There is a lot of people that play into that, do you know what I’m saying?

LC: Sure.

WE: Or did or played into it, I don’t know what’s going on now, you know.

LC: Do you have an opinion about how the federal government is taking care of, not just Vietnam era veterans but veterans of the service, career veterans like yourself? Has the federal government put resources behind caring for men who served the country?

WE: Well I guess one could say they could always do more. I know like in my incidence because I make a decent wage I have to pay to use the VA (Department of Veteran Affairs) facility. I have a card that I carry because I guess I picked up high blood pressure from somewhere along the line. I didn’t think service had anything to do with it but I have a card that if I wanted to go to the doctor I could but I would have to pay almost as much if not more to go out there then I do from my normal insurance.

LC: And your normal insurance comes to you as an employee.

WE: Yes, exactly. Plus I have TRICARE as a back up.

LC: Are you an employee of the school system?

WE: Yes.

LC: What do you actually do now Bill?

WE: I’m an Air Force Junior ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) Instructor.

LC: Ok.

WE: Still in the people business.

LC: Do you have any observations on the young people who are volunteering now to come into the Air Force and their degree of devotion to the country and to service? What do you see in the young people that come to you?
WE: Well a lot of them, until this near east thing came up, a lot of them went in the service for the education benefits. I’ve always sat and told them, “Let me tell you something. You can go in for the education benefits all you want to but you remember that number one if there is a conflict you’re going to get involved. Number two the job comes first, the education comes secondary. Don’t lose focus of that. These recruiters will tell you that you’ll have all the time in the world for you education and stuff but that’s not necessarily so. You got to remember the mission comes first.” Most of these kids today are very patriotic and stuff. A lot of them, secondary is the education portion of the free, the GI Bill and stuff like that. Talk about shock and awe that’s what these Reservists and guard people here in the state of Florida, well I’m sure nationwide, their in shock and awe in the fact that they finally did get called up. I mean we got a group of people here in the 124th, they’re coming home, they’ve been gone over a year, coming home next week I think.

LC: What do you think about the force structure right now, the size of the American military? Is it adequate to what we’re confronting overseas or do we need to increase the size?

WE: Well I can only go by what I read because I’ve been retired since ’87 of course and I’m far away from the mission so I read. You may have more access to data than I do. I got the Air Force Times, the airmen magazines, the normal rags that say what’s going on, as far as their allowed to say what’s going on. I would say I would like to see more troops in. I think that you work a lot sharper with a decent duty day and a decent time for recreation and sleep versus being task. Like I say I go back to those days that’s over, those 12 hour days, six days a week, one day off and then roll and doing the other opposite 12 hours for six days. That was a killer. I’m telling you that was a killer. That was probably the hardest, most stressful work I did. Those 14 hours a day, seven days a week in Laos didn’t hold a candle to that.

LC: And you were a young man when you were doing that. That tells you something about the degree of stress associated with that kind of a schedule. Bill, do you have any feelings or thoughts about Vietnam now? It’s unified under Communists government, doesn’t give any sign of deteriorating from inside in the same way that the
Soviet Union did. Do you think about Southeast Asia and Laos as in the same boat really with Vietnam?

WE: Hit me again with that question.

LC: I just wondered if you think about the places that you served over in Southeast Asia that are now under Communists rule. Do you ever think about perhaps visiting over there? Now a lot of servicemen are going back over there.

WE: I wouldn’t mind going over there if a bunch of guys were going over or something like that I wouldn’t mind going over and seeing Laos again. As far as what’s going on over there, I really don’t know. We don’t hear a whole lot about it. I know that we’re trying to establish ties with them.

LC: Yes, that’s right. Have you ever gone back to Thailand at all?

WE: No I haven’t. I haven’t been back to the Far East at all.

LC: But it is something that you’d think about doing?

WE: Oh yeah. I would have no problem going over there.

LC: Bill, are you active in Vietnam veteran organizations of any kind?

WE: Not really. I’m a socialite at the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars).

LC: You’re a socialite huh?

WE: Go for the bands and the dances and I belong to the normal organizations, the Sergeants Association, the Air Force Association, not active. I don’t know I just kind of felt that I made my contribution the 25 I was in and that’s it. I’m really interested in this because, in your project, because I think that was a very important part of your history and it needs to be recorded and a very important part of my life and I think that hopefully lessons learned from that will stay around for a long time.

LC: Well we’re very glad…

WE: Some were bad lessons.

LC: Yes, good and bad really. We’re very glad to have your participation both in the oral history project and hopefully we’ll see you out here at the center at some point.

WE: Yes, please keep me in mind for that.

LC: I very much will. I have notes to that in fact all over the place actually. Is there anything else that you would like to add, anything else that has come to mind or that you recall about your time over in Laos or Thailand?
WE: No, you’ve given me pretty good opportunity to bring all of it out. I had to interject some things that I thought of. I hope that’s the steno. I hope that the steno he or she can ferret through all that. Really that’s what it is isn’t it; it’s a collection of thoughts?

LC: That’s right and there is no right or wrong order. As things come up. I just wondered if anything else had kind of popped into your mind.

WE: No, it was, even though it was not a great part of our history, well I guess it wasn’t a great part of our history, it was a great part of my life and I just have no ill feelings about any of it. Other than the fact that I wished we would of, like I said I wish South Vietnam would still be free and maybe North Vietnam.

LC: Well thanks a lot Bill. Thank you very much.