Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I’m conducting an oral history interview with Mr. David Harp. I am in Lubbock, Texas on the campus of Texas Tech University, the Special Collections Library interview room. Mr. Harp you are in Ashburn, Georgia, is that correct?

David Harp: That’s correct.

RV: Great. Sir, if we could, let’s start with some basic biographical information, when and where you were born?

DH: I was born in Ashburn, Georgia, December the 31st, 1928.

RV: Did you grow up in Ashburn?

DH: Yes, in fact I’m living in the same house I was born in.

RV: So you’ve basically come full circle and come back home?

DH: Right. Well, I left here, let’s see I think it was ’46 when I graduated from Ashburn High School, went off to college, and I was down at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and they were about to draft me, Korean War. And I didn’t want any part of the walking army so I immediately went and joined the Air Force.

RV: Okay, before we get to that point, how would you describe your childhood?

DH: Well, more or less normal. My father, he traveled a lot and he did own some [several] farms scattered around South Georgia.
RV: Was he a farmer?
DH: Well, per se, we had back in those days we had sharecroppers, although we lived in town, but we did own one farm, which was only two miles from town. We operated it ourselves raised cattle and hogs, peanuts and cotton [and watermelon]. But I never did work too much on the farm. In, I guess, let’s see, the ‘30s I guess. My mother and father opened up a grocery store in town.
RV: In Ashburn?
DH: In Ashburn, yes. Of course my mother operated that most of the time because my father traveling that much, he worked for the North American Land Company.
RV: Did you work in the store?
DH: Well, I was a little too young right then. But after school I’d just come home and mess around like any kid would, but then later as I got a little larger and all I used to have to run the tractor out at the farm quite a bit but that’s about the extent. [I also kept the yard mowed, which is about 100 x 200 ft.]
RV: Did you do that after school?
DH: Yes, during the summers.
RV: So how long did your family keep the grocery store open?
DH: They sold that out, oh gosh, let’s see, it must have been in the latter ‘40s I guess or mid ‘40s.
RV: How was it growing up during the Depression?
DH: Well, there wasn’t much money, although we did manage. We had, you might say plenty of food because of the farm and all. In fact after I retired, came back I was up at the car dealership one day, and this elderly black man and said, “Aren’t you David Harp.” I said, “Yes.” He used to work for my father on the farm. He was saying, “Well, we sure didn’t have much money but we always had plenty to eat.”
RV: I guess that’s an advantage of working on a farm.
DH: Right.
RV: What are your most vivid memories of the Depression?
DH: Not too much. I really don’t recall, I know a lot of people had terrible times but like I said, we were fortunate that we had land that we could grow our own food on
and raise our own meat, process our own syrup and meats, [almost] everything that we
needed.

RV: So in Ashburn you attended elementary school and middle school and.
DH: And high school.
RV: And high school, yes.
DH: Yes.
RV: What do you remember about your high school years?
DH: To tell you the truth, not an awful lot. It wasn’t very memorable. At that
time, it was a small school. I think in my class we only had about, I think it was around
twenty-eight or thirty in my class, and of course after school everybody went on to their
home. Back then we walked to school, they didn’t have buses, not like they do today.
RV: Right, how far did you have to walk to school?
DH: It was about a mile, maybe a mile and a quarter.
RV: What were your favorite subjects in high school?
DH: My favorites were geography and history. I detested math and English.
RV: Did you play any sports?
DH: No, I didn’t.
RV: Why not?
DH: I just didn’t seem to have an interest in it. Of course they didn’t push sports,
well I mean we played ball and stuff like that, but it wasn’t organized like it is today,
where you have the intramural sports, everything.
RV: Did your parents emphasize education, how important it was?
DH: Yes, of course a lot of it I had to dig out on my own, because like I had told
you, my father traveled so much and my mother was working keeping the store. So I
wasn’t what you would call an “A” student because I didn’t apply myself like I should
have, but I finally made it.
RV: Did you have any siblings?
DH: Well, I got a late start in life. Oh, wait a minute, siblings, brothers and sister.
RV: Brothers and sisters, yes sir.
DH: [Laughs] I had two half sisters and one half brother, one whole brother and
one sister that she passed away when she was only two just before I was born. My
father's first wife had died of the flu epidemic, back it was in 1918 I believe sometime
along in there, and later he met my mother in Atlanta, and they got married.

RV: Whereabouts is Ashburn, is it close to Atlanta?
DH: No, we’re about 180 miles south of Atlanta, it’s right on Interstate 75 going
south. We’re about eighty-two miles north of the Florida line.

RV: So, you graduated from high school in 1946 and you went to college?
DH: Right.

RV: Now, why did you choose to go to college then? Was it expected of you or
did you really want to?
DH: Yes, it was expected. I had wanted to go to Canada and join the Royal
Canadian Air Force. They would take you younger than our forces would, but my
parents wouldn’t go along [with that]. My oldest brother, he was in the Canadian Air
Force, and after we got into war then he was transferred back into the American Air
Force, but let’s see where was I, oh lost my train of thought.

RV: Well, let me ask you this, where did you get the desire to fly and to join the
Air Force?
DH: I guess, well as a child they used to have these little barnstorming pilots that
occasionally would come through the town, take people up for rides for a dollar, and I
was just, I forget how old I was when I took my first airplane ride, but I was real, real
young. I just fell in love with it then, and [I would take] every chance that I could get a
ride like that I’d take it. I just told my oldest brother was a pilot; that probably influenced
me, and the fact that I did not want to be in the walking army.

RV: Did you have any military tradition in your family, besides your brother?
DH: Well, my whole brother he was in the Navy. He and my oldest brother, they
both went in before we were in war, and my youngest brother, he went and joined the
U.S. Navy, and my oldest brother he went to Canada and joined the Royal Canadian Air
Force.

RV: How about anybody before; your father or his line, his family?
DH: No, my father wasn’t in the service.

RV: Anybody before him?
DH: Not that I recall. I had a cousin, older cousin that he had been in the Spanish-American War but I was so young then I don’t remember too much about it when he would stop by to visit sometimes. Then my mother, she had a brother that was in the Army during World War I, but that’s about it.

RV: What did you think about World War Two while you were in high school?

DH: Well, I of course having two brothers in the service and then the fact that the way Japanese had attacked us at Pearl Harbor influenced all of us I think, and of course we were just hoping that we would be victorious and defeat the Japanese and the Germans.

RV: Did you follow the war on the radio?

DH: Oh, yes.

RV: Did you go to the Saturday picture show and see the newsreels?

DH: Yes. We, at that time, we don’t even have a theater here now, but back in those days we did have one and they’d have the newsreels about the war.

RV: Did your two brothers survive the war?

DH: Yes, thank goodness. Now, my brother that was in the Navy, he was severely wounded during the Coral Sea battle, but he survived; thank goodness.

RV: So, tell me again where you went to college in 1946?

DH: Oh, well I first went to Emory University down at Valdosta, it has now been closed, but I only went there a year, then transferred. Well I went to Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. It was rather a religious fanatic school, so after a year there I had enough of that, and that’s when I transferred to Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College because my father just passed away. I had to take over the management of the farms. Then the, when they started to draft me, I didn’t have quite enough credits for the Air Force or officer’s training as a pilot, so I transferred to Gordon Military College, and I went there for, I think it was a half year until I had my credits.

RV: This is 1950?

DH: That would have been in, yes I guess 1950. Let’s see I went into the service, the latter part of ’50 I believe is right. Just a minute, let me check my, I graduated in ’47, I just saw that date.

RV: ’47, from Gordon?
DH: No, from Ashburn High School.
RV: Oh, okay '47.
DH: I just happened to see that date.
RV: Okay, so 1947 high school, then you went to Emory for a year and then Bob Jones University for a year and that would take us to 1949, the Abraham Ag.
DH: Yes, and at Gordon Military College I did the first quarter, second quarter, I believe it was just two quarters, could have been two and a half quarters, I don’t recall those dates, but while I was there, well the draft board here was determined to draft me and I lacked just one more subject or, I forget how many hours you [need to] get a credit, but I went to the president and asked him if I could take an exam and if I passed it, would they give me the credit for it, since they were fixing to draft me. They agreed to. So I, and I forget now what subject that was in, but I did pass, so they gave me the credit and then I went right ahead and joined the Air Force.
RV: Okay, this was at Gordon?
DH: Yes.
RV: How did you like the military life there at Gordon?
DH: It was okay. It wasn’t all that strict, we wore a uniform but it really didn’t have an awful lot of military training but I imagine, well I don’t know how they train them today in military [colleges]. Some of them are real strict; some are lax.
RV: Right, now did you think, you enlisted in the Air Force, if you had been drafted do you think you would have gone into the Army probably or?
DH: Yes, if I’d been drafted they would have put me in the Army, in the infantry probably.
RV: So where did you go, when you enlisted?
DH: Okay, well I went to Shaw Air Force base in South Carolina. At that time my brother just happened to be stationed there, so I went up there and took my exams for cadets, and thank goodness I passed them and I had to go before a board and passed that okay. Then they said well it would be approximately maybe three months before they had a class opening, so I just went ahead and enlisted in the regular Air Force as an airman. I was sent to Lackland Air Force base for basic training, after that then they transferred me to, where was it, Perrin Air Force base I believe it was, and I just worked
as a clerk there for about two months and then they had an opening for me, so then I was
sent in to Malden [Air Force Base] Missouri for basic pilot training and officer’s training.
We started out in the T-6.

RV: T-6?

DH: Yes, single engine plane and six months, and graduated from there, then I
was sent to let’s see, Perrin, back to Perrin, and trained in the B-25 and then graduated
from that, then I was commissioned as Second Lieutenant.

RV: Let me ask you, what did you think of President Truman and his handling of
the Korean War and as a president in and of itself?

DH: Well, as president I think he did the right thing in dropping the atomic bomb.
A lot of people don’t realize that it saved a lot more lives than were killed. We killed
more people in Tokyo when we fire bombed it than the atom bomb killed, but a lot of
people don’t realize it. Now, I think he made a terrible mistake when he relieved
McArthur. At that time, had China joined in, we [would have] had the advantage. We
had the bomb and they didn’t, but unfortunately when he relieved, the Japanese, I
happened to be stationed in Japan while McArthur was still there and the Japanese looked
upon him with the same reverence that they looked upon their emperor. I think it was
more of a shock to them than it was to the Americans.

RV: And how did you think about Truman’s handling of the war itself, on the
ground?

DH: Well, basically I think he did a good job. Lately some of our presidents
fenced us in, Vietnam for instance, our hands were tied, we could not bomb or fight
unless we had permission from Washington, and you’re probably are aware that one Air
Force general was relieved of duty because [he gave orders to bomb] the Ho Chi Minh
Trail that ran down from North Vietnam, came down from Laos, Cambodia, then crossed
into southern Vietnam. Well he went ahead and bombed it, because he was sick and tired
of people being ambushed and everything; as a result, they fired him.

RV: Right. Let’s talk about your basic training back at Lackland. What do you
remember about that?

DH: Well, at Lackland we were living in tents, dirt floor and rocks grew
overnight. That was one of our jobs, picking out the rocks out of our tents every
morning, but it was way overcrowded, of course it was during war time, and latrines, it
was just a long ditch that was dug in the ground, out in the open. They had a siege of
[sickness] people, people were fainting and passing out, they didn’t even have enough
ambulances to haul them all to the hospital.

RV: Why they were fainting and passing out?

DH: I guess it was from food poisoning or something [like dysentery], but they
finally shipped, I guess a couple of thousand of us up to Wichita Falls [Texas], and we
finished our training up there. There was a big Congressional investigation about the
conditions there [at Lackland afterwards] then.

RV: So it was pretty tough conditions?

DH: Yes. But it wasn’t too bad other than having to pull KP.

RV: What kind of weapons training did you receive there?

DH: We got a little training in the M-1 and--My wife just interrupted me, I’m
sorry. We got training in the M-1 and throwing hand grenades, and a .45 automatic pistol
and that was about the basics of it.

RV: Did the physical aspect of that basic training present problems for you or
were you in pretty good shape?

DH: No, I got along okay. It wasn’t until later that I had a problem, we’ll get to
that later in the interview I guess.

RV: Okay, yes, yes sir we will. Did you feel like you received good instruction
there at Lackland?

DH: Yes, well it was basically instilling in people discipline and how to accept
orders, things like that.

RV: Does anything stand out in your mind about that training besides the fainting
and passing out incident?

DH: No, not too much, it was pretty well just basic [training] after we got up to
Wichita Falls, my brother that’s in the Air Force happened to fly out and dropped by to
see me. We were standing, he had gone to our orderly room and they had paged me, and
we were standing outside [when] another airmen in fatigues like I was came by. I saluted
him. My brother laughed he said, “You salute the basic airmen?” I said, “I salute
anything that moves.”
RV: Just to be safe.
DH: Right.
RV: So, when you went to Perrin Air Force base you basically had a desk job as a clerk there?
DH: Yes.
RV: And how did you like that station?
DH: It was okay, it was sort of like my job, new people coming in or people going out, we had a sort of like a locator service, and I handled all that. I’d have to index everybody’s name, their phone numbers and how they could be located. [I performed a locator service, registering troops arriving and departing.]
RV: And how long were you there at Perrin?
DH: About two months.
RV: And then you went to your, basically your advanced training at Malden.
DH: Right.
RV: Now was what it like when you received your first flying lessons?
DH: They’re very interesting. Of course [on] your first flight, you’re not even handling the controls, but it was a lot of fun.
RV: Do you remember your first flight? I mean just your first flight, not when you were flying, but before that when someone else was flying?
DH: After I’m in the Air Force?
RV: Yes, sir your very first flight at Malden.
DH: No, I really don’t remember anything about the first flight, I remember my solo flight.
RV: What was that like, is this your very first one?
DH: First time the instructor let me take the plane up by myself. It was in the winter, and there was a lot of snow then in Missouri and the T-6 was real bad about the yaw [pulling to the left on take off and to the right on landing]. So I took off okay, when I came around to land I went [the torque caused the plane to veer] off the runway. Didn’t hurt the plane or nothing, but right away my instructor came running up, jumped in and said, “Go around again.” So he took me around again, shot another two landings, then he got back out. He says, “All right now. Go ahead and do it right this time.” So,
fortunately I did stay on the runway when I landed then. Everyone that soloed that day
[as is the custom after soloing the first time], the custom was after we go back to our
hooch area, they grabbed us, took us down to swimming pool, they had to break the ice
and threw us all in and I tell you, it was cold.

RV: This is your initiation basically.

DH: Right.

RV: So, what else do you remember about your advanced training, this is your
basic pilot training?

DH: Right. Oh, one thing that I do recall during the basic training.

RV: This is back at Lackland.

DH: No, this is back at Malden. It was a terrible winter and all the power in that
area of Missouri was out. We had no heat [or electricity] in our quarters or anything, so
they had issued us sleeping bags and extra blankets, and we just darn near froze to death
there for about four days. Finally they found a carnival that was wintering somewhere [in
the area] and they managed to get their generators and that way we managed to get heat
[in our barracks] again.

RV: Now, what kind of officer training did you go through there in Malden?

DH: It was basically academic work, military studies and then of course flight
engineering, weather training and of course the same was true when we went to
advanced. We continued studies in military tactics and then of course, we’d have about
half a day of academic work and about a half a day of flying [flight] training and of
course in the flying training we were having instructions on maintenance of aircraft and
all.

RV: How did you enjoy flying?

DH: Oh, I loved it. I really miss it today.

RV: So, how long were you there at Malden?

DH: It was, well I guess it was about six months at Malden, about six months at
advanced training.

RV: And then you went to Perrin and did?

DH: No, six months at Malden for basic training, and six months up at Perrin
[Vance, Oklahoma] for advanced training. Then when I was commissioned and
graduated, then I was transferred, well I first, they first sent me down to Fort Benning, Georgia, which is an Army, one of the largest Army bases in the States. We trained in the C-46, which is a big twin-engine transport and we trained in dropping paratroopers and checking out in the C-46. I was there for about roughly maybe about two months or three months, I forget.

RV: Now you had trained in the B-25, right previous to this?
DH: Right, yes.
RV: How was it flying the larger aircraft? Was it more difficult for you?
DH: No, actually through my career I had found that going from a smaller plane to a larger plane one is easier than going from a large one to a small one.
RV: Why is that?
DH: Good question.
RV: What do you think?
DH: I think the main reason, if you go from a big plane to a smaller one, you probably over control. But after our combat crew training at Fort Benning then I left for Japan.
RV: What year was this, do you remember?
DH: This would have been in ’51 and when I arrived in Japan a lot of us that had trained there together on the C-46s, we were all sent down to Brady to fly, they had a C-46 group there and we were flying personnel, supplies, you name it, we were flying it.
RV: Just to Korea or all over Asia?
DH: All over Korea and usually we’d go over, take a load of stuff over [supplies or troops], we might get, after we offloaded that, they might put on wounded personnel or the mail or dead soldiers that were in body bags. It just depended on what needed to be transported.
RV: How did you feel about flying into a combat zone?
DH: That didn’t worry me too much. I think about the only thing I worried about was maybe being, going down in a plane and the guerillas capturing me because they usually didn’t keep you alive very long. But going [flying] into Seoul, especially at night, you had to be very careful because the homing device, there’s some big mountains around Seoul and one of the big mountains is in the northern sector, and the enemy used
to tune in on the same frequency, which would try to lure you into the mountain, so you
had to keep double checking to make sure you weren’t homing in on the wrong homer.
[One night I had landed at K-48 to offload some cargo when “Bednight Charlie”
approached. This was the name we had given the small single-engine Vietnamese plane.
Late at night the pilot would fly it down through the valleys to a base to drop two or three
small bombs. While we were unloading the warning sirens went off, so we had to have a
complete blackout. I ran from the aircraft until I felt a wall. Thinking this would give me
some kind of protection from the bombs. After the “all clear” sirens sounded and the
lights came on. I discovered that I had crouched down next to a huge gas storage tank.]
RV: Did you ever have any difficulties?
DH: No, no I of course, a few times my homer would pick up the other one, the
enemy’s [homers] but by crosschecking with some of the other homers, you could double
check your position.
RV: Did you ever have any memorable experiences there flying on this mission
here when you’re based out of Japan?
DH: Well, no after the armistice, the following, the next summer they equipped
one of our C-46s with a huge tank in[side] it and mounted a pipe across it, underneath the
plane across the rear elevators. I was sent over, I was spraying DDT over the UN bases
and the large cities in South Korea and all that was insect control and everything. This
was done at just treetop or housetop level.
RV: Wow, still flying the C-46?
DH: Yes, and it was funny though, when flying over Seoul or Taegu or Pusan or
some of those cities, you’d make one or two passes and when you’d come back all these
kids would have their kites up and they’d string them way up where we’d have to fly
through them or cut their strings, so kids were just having a lot of fun with us.
RV: What did you think of the Japanese people while you were stationed in
Japan?
DH: I enjoyed it, I sure did. Of course that was my first tour, when we got to my
second tour it was even better.
RV: How old were you when you were first sent over to Japan?
DH: Oh, gosh let’s see I was born in December of 1928, just a minute.
RV: Maybe twenty-three?
DH: [Mumbling] I guess I was, yes in my early twenties. Yes, I’d be in my early twenties, sometime along there.
RV: How long was this tour in Japan, was it a two year?
DH: It was supposed to have been for up to year but after [the armistice] the Army spooked then they extended us all to an eighteen month tour.
RV: And you did the DDT flying after the armistice?
DH: Yes.
RV: Okay. And what did you think of the outcome of the war?
DH: Well, it sort of hurt our feelings that we had to give up all that land that McArthur had taken, and we had to move back to the 38th parallel, but I guess all in all it was all right.
RV: And after your Japan tour, where were you sent then?
DH: Okay, well after I came back from Korea I was, let’s see, where did I go then.
RV: Was it El Paso?
DH: Oh, I went to El Paso, Texas and I was stationed at Biggs, which is a SAC [Strategic Air Command] base, but I was under TAC [Tactical Air Command]. TAC had a tow target squadron there where we towed targets, we were flying. They had B-26s and B-29s and the B-26s would tow targets for the Army there to fire it, or B-29s we’d send those up to Alaska and to Greenland, Goosebay, on temporary duties, usually about thirty to forty-five days at a clip.
RV: Okay, you would fly them up there?
DH: Yes, well I was sent there. They had one C-47 and I was sent there to fly that, it’s similar to the C-46, just a little smaller. I went ahead and checked out in the B-26 and the B-29 and flew all three.
RV: Which of those three was your favorite aircraft?
DH: The B-29.
RV: Why is that?
DH: Well, it had four engines and it was pressurized.
RV: That makes a difference.
DH: Yes, it was real comfortable and real nice to fly. I enjoyed it and of course when you took off in that you were really building up your [flight] time too because it was long missions.

RV: Was that your favorite aircraft that you had flown up to that point?

DH: Up to that point, yes.

RV: Okay. And how long were you in El Paso?

DH: Let’s see, check my book right quick. December ’54 I got there, okay let’s see from ’54 to ’57 I guess.

RV: Okay, so three years basically.

DH: Yes, and then from El Paso, after my tour there, I was sent back to Korea, and was stationed at Osan Air Base. [In June of 1957 I received transfer orders to Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina as Chief of Reciprocating Aircraft for the 9th Air Force Headquarters Support Squadron. This duty entailed the responsibility of maintaining flight records etc. for pilots assigned to the 9th Air Force including the Navy and a few English pilots. As Instructor I was also in charge of Standardization and Flight Evaluation. I was also the test pilot for C-47 and C-45 aircraft. I had seven C-47s and ten C-45s under my command, for which I cut Flight orders, dispatching them around the United States. In 1959 I was ordered to Osan Air Force Base in Korea.] That was then a top-secret operation, we had four C-47s with fuselage, we had tape recorders and everything [listening devices], and people from security service [personnel] operated those for us. We would fly up to it was northwest of Korea [over the Yellow Sea towards China]. The Russians had a base at Port Arthur, and we would go up and orbit for about usually five to six hours at a time, just taping all their conversations and eavesdropping on them. We’d fly two missions a day, one in the morning, one in the evening, and sometimes if the weather was just too bad where we couldn’t get up in that area we’d go up to the northeast, up towards the islands that Russia had up there, up around Vladivostok, up at that general area.

RV: Now were you made aware of exactly what your mission was?

DH: Oh, yes.

RV: And how many personnel did you have on board the plane?
DH: Okay, well it would be pilot and co-pilot, engineer and then usually we had about four to five security people that were operating the tape recorders. Of course they were operating each one on different frequencies and all. In the Port Arthur area several times, we had a radar site, just it was little, I guess it was in the area of the 38th parallel, but there were three little islands up here, South Korea had one and the North Koreans had two of them. We did have a radar station on the one that South Korea owned. They would help watch, if they spotted any, what was, the Russian plane?

RV: The MiGs?

DH: Yes, MiGs. If they spotted any coming out of Port Arthur in our direction, they’d notify us and we’d do a 180 and fireball it trying to get out of there.

RV: Now, were you in Russian air space?

DH: We didn’t actually enter into their space but of course they claimed it, but according to our regulations we were in international air space.

RV: Okay, did you have any memorable incidents happen to you when you were doing these missions?

DH: No, not in that outfit. We--The Navy [plane was orbiting nearby and was shot down]. I know we were out one day orbiting and the radar advised us that planes were in the area, so we turned and started coming back. That same day the Navy was also doing the same thing, but they were in a different area, they did have a plane shot down that day.

RV: So they would freely fire upon you?

DH: Oh, yes.

RV: Even if you weren’t in their air space.

DH: According to us we were not in their air space. According to them we were.

RV: Okay, so you were a sitting duck if these planes came up on you.

DH: Right.

RV: Was this stuff, since this was top secret, this stuff was not reported back, the shoot down of this plane wasn’t reported back to the families or what?

DH: I don’t know how the Navy handled that.

RV: Did they tell you how they would handle yours if you were shot down?

DH: No, they never informed us about that.
RV: And you flew according to your notes 145 of these combat spy missions,
DH: That sounds about right.
RV: Okay, and this went on for what, a year or so?
DH: Yes, I guess Korea, I guess, I think I was there just over a year, but I can’t
say for sure, I don’t have those notes handy on me. But after I finished that tour then I
took a concurrent tour in Japan, and I was stationed at Tachikawa air base.
RV: What was your mission there?
DH: I was sent over there, started out in the C-47s again, it was a SAM squadron,
Special Air Missions. [We transported] High ranking officers and civilian dignitaries and
all, when they would come over to the Far East they’d usually either come over
commercial or [carrier or] on MAC flights [Military Air Command], then we would pick
them up and fly them throughout the Far East, either over Japan to Hong Kong to
Vietnam or Thailand, wherever they needed to go. I was an instructor and test pilot there.
RV: Instructor test pilot?
DH: Yes, so I was also assigned, I used to fly the Japanese Imperial Staff when
they would go around Japan inspecting their bases.
RV: What was it like meeting?
DH: Oh, that was excellent because when we would land the Japanese, they really
gave us the first class treatment too.
RV: What would they do for you?
DH: Well, they’d put us up in a real nice Japanese hotel and then usually one of
the managers or assistant managers or they’d take us out for dinner, I suppose, I don’t
know I guess they must have had it in the Japanese papers, because I know on one trip
my radio operator, he had gone out and gotten sort of tipsy and forgot what hotel he was
at and he just asked some Japanese, he’s say oh, you’re staying in such and such a hotel.
RV: So he knew exactly where you were.
DH: I used to always instruct my crews when we were flying around in Japan at
different places, if they went into a Japanese club or cabaret or anything, some of them
didn’t want Americans in there. I said if they go to raise their hand just be polite, turn
around, go on somewhere else. [Some establishments did not want American Soldiers.]
RV: Why did they not want Americans? This was in 1960, I believe.
DH: Yes. I guess some of them just didn’t want Americans around, but when we flew the Japanese staff around we were welcomed wherever we went. It was amazing the change [the difference].

RV: Do you remember any of the other dignitaries that you flew around?

DH: I tell you, I flew so many generals and admirals I don’t even remember [their names] who all I did fly but. I did fly Floyd Hamilton, at that time he was in charge of all foreign aid, and of course taking him around, every place we’d land they’d roll out the red carpet, bands playing and everything, [and we too received ] first class treatment.

RV: How much contact did you have with your family back in Georgia?

DH: Just letters, whenever. Of course I was single then, just whenever the mail ran or whenever somebody felt like writing.

RV: Was your family supportive of you in the military?

DH: Oh, yes.

RV: So, after that, that in 1960 in Japan, that tour lasted how long, for about a year?

DH: No, I was there longer than that. Let’s see, I got there in, I don’t have that bloomin’ date. But after I’d been there I guess for a couple of years, they called me in one day and told me that I was being assigned to a [top] secret assignment, and the Air Force had [already] picked a flight crew and a ground crew on a very top secret assignment. So they sent us back to the United States. This has been declassified; it was Project Hilo Hattie, a C-54, that’s a four-engine plane. And we came back to Fort Worth, Texas and there they had taken an old C-54 and [installed] put all kinds of cameras and detection [devices], you think name it, and they had it. We stayed there about, I guess about a month and a half maybe, checking out on all these systems and we used to have to take off, we’d take off late in the afternoon so as to arrive over the Eglin proving grounds, that’s down in Florida, in the pan handle. We didn’t land there, but they set aside an area there where we could fly and to check out all our equipment [in secrecy] and then we’d fly back to Fort Worth. The security people, about every week they’d move us to a different hotel, and so when we [moved about every week until we] finally got checked out on everything, and one, [we also found out] the most unusual things about this plane. Now most any airplane that you fly and burn off fuel, you usually pick
up speed and get better consumption on your fuel. [Most aircrafts consume less fuel as you burn off gas, which makes the craft lighter. Therefore you also pick up speed.] This plane was exactly opposite. The only thing we could figure out was the Delta factor, which is being so old accumulation, dirt, loose nuts and bolts that had been dropped inside different areas and all [which changed the center of gravity], it actually started consuming more fuel. Of course flying back and forth to Florida as many times as we did. I had three navigators on board and we always ran fuel consumption charts on every flight so we figured that going from California to Hawaii we would have to have a zero wind factor. Well, they staged us through McClellan Air Force base, which was in Sacramento, and we got there. Well, waiting for a zero wind factor we sat on the ground there for about, I guess for around five or six days. Finally they forecast a zero wind factor, so we got ready to take off and I said well, look, we’re going to stop at Hamilton [AFB] and top off our fuel tanks. Hamilton is just across the bay from San Francisco, and there was an Air Force base there. Fortunately and thank goodness we did stop and top them off because, during the night we’d already passed the point of no return and my senior navigator [a captain] came up, shook his head, he’d been asleep and these two other navigators, they were Lieutenants and he, the Captain came up he says, “we are in deep kimshi. We have picked up a fifteen knot head wind.” And when he said that I just banked over about thirty degrees to the left, told him I said, “Give me a heading for Hilo.” Hilo sits quite a few miles further east than Honolulu and at the same time I started to slow that down. Of course, naturally we sent out an SOS but we finally made it in to Hilo and we had about fifteen minutes worth of fuel left when we landed.

RV: Wow. Was that your closest call?

DH: Yes, I guess up to that time. Well, I did have, back before I got on this assignment, I had a pretty close call, C-47, we used to send our planes, our C-47 down to Hong Kong for what we called IRAN, its where they take them apart, replace any worn parts, rebuild them, everything. We had sent another crew down to pick it up, but the pilot got a notice from the States that there had been a death in his family, so the Air Force let him just catch a plane out of Hong Kong back to the States. They called me out and sent me down commercially to Hong Kong to fly it back, and when I got down there the, well I got down there late one night. I was going to take off the next day to bring it
back and [several] service people that were there on leave or R & R, some of them
stationed in Okinawa. I think there were one or two, what’s that up at Taiwan because
we would fly from Hong Kong to Taiwan, refuel, go to Okinawa, refuel and then into
Japan. Well, the weather was real bad, it was really raining, but the weather there at
Hong Kong [Airport], we thought we’d be out of it pretty quick so we took off and got up
to our altitude of about eight or nine thousand feet, leveled off. [And ran into] such a bad
electrical storm, my navigator couldn’t get any readings off of his equipment or anything.
We couldn’t pick up anything either on our radios. About that time number two engine
was about to blow up, I didn’t feather it, but I had to reduce the power where it was, it
just pulled its own weight, so I did a 180 and headed back towards Hong Kong and going
in well, I don’t know whether you’ve ever been in Hong Kong or not, but [you approach
from the bay and] the runway is dredged up in the bay there [with water all around it],
there’s mountains all around it [on three sides]. Once you pass the outer marker you’re
committed, especially on a single engine you are definitely committed [to land].

RV: To landing?
DH: Right and I was coming in on final, well it was zero-zero, no visibility at all
and fortunately they had a, do you know what ILS is?
RV: ILS?
DH: ILS, its an instrument landing system.
RV: No, I don’t.
DH: Well, normally it gives you a course and a glide scope [reading]. Well, the
course line, let’s see, [I could not get] the glide scope [reading] I couldn’t receive it but I
did get the course line, and the GCA [Ground Control Approach] was bringing me in too
[giving my altitude readings], and all at once they called and they said just continue
normal rate of descent, we’ve completely lost you due to the heavy rain. Well, I told the
engineer, I said go back and tell everybody to brace for possible crash landing and I just
set up a five hundred foot a minute descent, and looking out the side of the window,
suddenly once I saw lights go by and I just cut the power and made a beautiful landing,
but after I landed, turned off the runway, then my legs started shaking so bad I had to
have my copilot taxi it on in. So I told everyone I said “Well, that will do it for today.” I
said, “If they get this thing fixed we’ll depart tomorrow morning.” The next morning none of my passengers showed up. I think they decided to go commercial.

RV: Oh, that’s funny.

RV: Okay, sir if you could continue talking about Hilo Hattie.

DH: Well, as I said we arrived at Hilo, with only about fifteen minutes of fuel remaining.

RV: Now is this your first mission out there, first flight out there or was this just?

DH: On Hilo Hattie yes. So, after refueling and all, then we flew on up to Hickam, and there we were met by the [several] admirals and generals from PACAF headquarters, and briefed. We, on our way over of course, all our [flight] reports and everything had to be encrypted and everything, which was a big headache [time consuming and complicated].

RV: What was involved in that procedure?

DH: Well, you’re giving your position, your altitude, flight conditions and everything, but we had to encode it in a secret thing, they changed the books every day, and it was a real headache. So I asked one of the admirals, he asked, well of course they were talking to us about our fuel problems, and did we have any other problems, [I mentioned the coding and decoding problems] I said, “Yes, my squadron at Tachikawa,” that they had picked me from. I said, “They have a plane, they have a C-54 sitting in Hong Kong, going through IRAN.” I said, “Could we just paint those numbers on this airplane and then we can broadcast in the open? It would make it so much easier.” He said, “Sure.” So they rolled it into a hangar, repainted the numbers on it and then our security forces, I guess back here in the States, they completely lost us. So we took off from Hawaii then and flew to, well we stopped at Midway and refueled, and then Guam, then into Yokoda Air Base, and because of the secrecy of this mission they transferred me on paper from Tachikawa over to Yokota, and there at Yokota they had an extra hangar that was big enough [to accommodate] that we could put the C-54 in, and they placed [armed] guards around it so nobody could get into it. The way the plane was constructed, all this equipment, we had secret panels that opened and, in fact up [to expose among other equipment] we had a one hundred inch lens on one camera, it was a huge thing [camera], and it was on those little tiny rails, with an electric motor where it
could be moved from one side of the plane or the other and those hydraulic [exterior]
doors that were about, maybe two feet wide, and about four feet high, but when those
panels were closed, you could walk around the outside of the plane and you would never
find it, it fit so tight, same way under the fuselage. We had numerous panels under there
[the fuselage] that would open it, different types of cameras and flare drops, [chutes] etc.
As far as this huge camera, when we would land someplace we’d roll it to one side. We
had these panels that we put up that made it look like we had extra fuel tanks there that
actually had valves, gauges and lights that would light up and everything to camouflage
it. So after we got back to Yokoda then, we had any minor maintenance that we had to
take care of. Then we were taking, we never had orders sending us to Vietnam, and they
told us that if we did go down they would deny [any knowledge of] us. On paper, the
plane belonged to some outfit [civilian company] in Washington State. I forget what
outfit [which company] it was supposed to belong to but that was sort of stupid because
still on the airplane it had U.S. Air Force written on it.

RV: So, how did they describe your mission to you?
DH: Well, what we did we, at that time; see this was in the early ‘60s. They
didn’t have any up-to-date charts or maps of Vietnam, and officially see the war hadn’t
started but, although we did get a lot of small arms fire, we were fortunate. We never got
hit, but at that time the Vietnamese hadn’t learned to lead their sights. They’d shoot
directly at the plane and it misses. But we mapped all of South Vietnam, all along the
Laos and Cambodian borders and all. And also, there were a time or two at night, we
flew blackout at night, and every once in a while our radio operators, they’d pick up some
Vietnamese pilot, South Vietnamese pilot that was calling in that he had an unknown
airplane coming in from Laos or Cambodia or somewhere and was asking permission to
shoot it down. [Our mission was to map Vietnam and the border areas of Laos and
Cambodia, since our forces did not have current maps. We could also pick up the radio
transmissions of the Vietcong and located their exact positions. The South Vietnamese
secret police could then arrest them if they were located in a city. If we located them in
the jungle, the South Vietnamese Air Force could bomb them. Officially we were not at
war in the early 1960s. We flew our missions between 1,500 and 9,000 feet depending
on what we had to accomplish. At low altitudes we did draw small arms fire, we were
fortunate not to get hit. The VC had not learned to shoot ahead of a moving target. They would aim directly at our plane and miss. While flying nighttime “black-out” missions, Vietnamese pilots would occasionally see our exhaust fire and call their command center for permission to shoot down an unidentified aircraft. Fortunately the command center personnel knew that we were flying and denied permission to shoot.

RV: And that was you?
DH: Yes. So, that would upset us quite a bit but fortunately, well thank goodness they had to call in too, to their command center, and they were told not to fire on it. So finally after about a, we spent a year there.

RV: Now, you flew from Japan, is that correct?
DH: We flew from Japan and stopped in the Philippines to refuel and take care of any minor maintenance and then on to Vietnam.

RV: How many missions would you fly a day or was there just one flight?
DH: Usually we’d fly a daylight mission and then we’d fly a night mission, depending on the requirements and let’s see, what was I leading up to.

RV: Let me ask you about the plane, was the plane easy to handle with all that equipment on it?
DH: Oh, yes.
RV: No problems, then.
DH: No, we didn’t have any problems there.

RV: Do you know how they picked you to fly it?
DH: No, I don’t. I guess because I was a bachelor [laughs]. In fact most of the crew were single. Of course I’d had a lot of experience flying in the Far East. I guess that was one of the criteria, but after about a year there then they had a globe master [Stratocruiser C-97], what was that plane called, Pan Am used to fly them across the Pacific, it was the big four-engine plane. It was a takeoff on a--after World War II ended, and there was a shortage of commercial aircraft, they took the basic design of the B-29 and changed it some, and made a passenger version. I’ve forgotten now, what they call that plane, but if it comes to me between the time that you send me the thing to look over, I’ll try to jot that in. But anyhow, they sent this plane down to replace us. So we flew back to Japan and then from Japan we brought the plane back to Fort Worth where it was
taken apart, all the equipment taken out, and the plane was destroyed. [After about a year
in Vietnam the Air Force decided to replace our C-54 and crew with a Stratocruiser (C-97). This aircraft was a take off on the B-29. There was a shortage of long-range
commercial aircraft after the war. By redesigning the basic C-29, they developed a
passenger version and Pan Am Airlines flew these on all their trans-pacific routes for
several years until they were replaced by jets.]

RV: Did you ever get to see the result of any missions, any of the maps?
DH: No, I didn’t, never did. It would be interesting to see. I do have a picture
though that, coming back into Japan on one flight. [I do have a picture returning to
Yakota AFB, Japan for scheduled maintenance on one of our tries. We took a picture of
the Tokyo Tower with our 100-inch camera. You could count the rivets in it. This was
taken from a distance of about ten miles away.] Well, I’ll back up. When we had to have
any major maintenance or inspections, we would have to take the plane back to Yokota to
this secure hangar and they’d work on, we’d work on it there and when we got through
then we’d go back to Vietnam. One interesting aspect about that particular mission,
when we arrived, like I said we had no orders to send us there [to Vietnam]. So we were,
[staying at] the Old Majestic Hotel in Saigon, we started holding up there. The whole
crew, we were crowded into this suite that had about three or four small rooms. We were
packed in there like sardines. Well, when I was flying Floyd Hamilton, and when we
were in Saigon with him, they had assigned this Chinese chap by the name, believe it or
not, Charlie Chan. Well after awhile, being so cooped up like we were in this hotel, I
said, “I’m going to try to find this guy.” Well, I finally located him and told him; well I
previously had gone to some real estate people to see if we could rent a villa where our
crew could all stay.

RV: Now, which crew this is the?
DH: Hilo Hattie.

RV: It was the Hilo Hattie crew?
DH: Yes.

RV: So you actually were stationed in Saigon for a period of time?
DH: I was living in Saigon. I wasn’t stationed there. But the real estate people,
most of them were French, and even though I had offered them as much as four thousand
dollars a month, rent, they insisted we sign a lease agreement and I tried to explain to
them that I could not sign anything. I said, “We’ll pay you in advance,” but they were
insisting we sign. Well, that didn’t work out, so after I contacted this Charlie Chan, he
introduced me to a Chinese friend of his there in Saigon that was real wealthy, and over
in Cholon, which is a suburb of Saigon, it’s the Chinese district, this chap owned a three-
story building that at one time had been a school. So he agreed to remodel it and rent it to
us, and he did a beautiful job on it [He even fixed the roof and put tables and a grill on it].
So, then we moved in there and he seemed to enjoy being around us, even up on the roof
he fixed it up, put in some barbecue places up there, and he’d actually furnish us the food,
the barbecue and everything. He’d bring his family over and we’d party and everything.
One funny thing though, our second floor had this little narrow balcony. A lot of times
when we’d come in from a flight we’d grab a beer out of our, he even put refrigerators
and air conditioners in all our rooms, and we’d grab a beer and go out and stand on the
balcony and watch the girls pedaling by on their motorcycles or bicycles. We’d lean on
this balcony, which was just, had a concrete top. Well, leaning against that concrete
would leave indentations on your arm and everything, so I told him one day, I said. “Gee,
whiz it’d be nice if you had tile on this.” The next day when we came in from a flight, he
had already had a crew up there and had laid tile all the way across the top of the balcony.

RV: Wow, he took care of you.

DH: Right.

RV: What were your impressions of Saigon?

DH: Well, it was a beautiful city at one time. The downtown part was still real
clean. Have you ever been there?

RV: Yes, sir.

DH: Oh, you have?

RV: Yes, sir.

DH: Were you in the service?

RV: No, sir I was not I was there on academic and research mission.

DH: Oh, I see. Well, to me it was a beautiful city, tree lines [streets and French-
influenced architecture], everything. I enjoyed it [the whole experience] and.
RV: Were you able to kind of come and go once you finished your flying that day, that night?

DH: Yes.

RV: So, there were no restrictions on you at all?

DH: No.

RV: Did you interact with the natives?

DH: Yes, and the funny thing was that if I started [going] out [by myself], after we moved into this hotel in Cholon, when I’d go out, like alone, I found out [noticed] that this Chinese guy would have somebody following me. I guess in case anything happened but it never did.

RV: Following you to protect you or?

DH: Yes, I guess so.

RV: Do you remember any significant incidents that happened while you were there in Saigon, in the city?

DH: No, not that I recall, I don’t know of anything. Once we, the security service had us get out of Saigon because they had gotten word that, I don’t know whether it was the Vietcong or the North Vietnamese had put a price on us, on any crew member that they could get their hands on, to find out what we were doing and everything, so we took off and went over to the Philippines for a few days.

RV: And you heard no more of that?

DH: No.

RV: Did you have any problems with the Vietnamese language or Vietnamese culture, adapting to it?

DH: No, well the language I never could master that or anything, but Japanese was real easy to pick up, but the Vietnamese and Chinese language I could never master. But as far as the people and all, we got along fine.

RV: How many men were on your flight crew?

DH: Oh gosh, let me see. Wait a minute, I got a plaque here, eleven.

RV: Did you receive a plaque for this operation?

DH: Well, when they assigned us over to Yokota, they put us under the administration of the 41st Air Division and because we were flying so many hours, we
started winning all their quarterly awards. It was a reconnaissance outfit, but they were
sort of upset about it because we took all the glory away from them. We flew so many
hours that a lot of our hours we couldn’t record because under Air Force regulations, you
can’t fly over a certain amount of hours in one month, I believe it’s around 140, I don’t
recall. I think it was 140, but we were exceeding that so once we hit 140 we just quit
logging it.

RV: So you had eleven men on board?
DH: Yes.
RV: Did the intelligence officers; did they bunk with you there in Cholon?
DH: We had people, it was a couple of guys from the CIA, there’s one guy from,
this sounds funny, [from the] Singer Sewing Machine.
RV: He was from, say that again; he was from the Singer Sewing Machine?
RV: That was what he was operating under?
DH: Evidently. Heck of a nice guy, but there were quite a few civilians there.

They didn’t fly on the missions with us, but they were there with us.
RV: Do you remember any of the protests that were going on against President
Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon there, when you were there in the early ‘60s?
DH: Just vaguely, just vaguely. But I don’t recall any of the specific problems
there.
RV: What did you think of Vietnam, the country itself?
DH: Well, flying over it, it appeared to be very beautiful, especially when you’d
fly over some of these rubber plantations and see these mansions, French style design,
sitting out there in the jungle. It was very impressive looking. In fact I happened to meet
one Frenchmen that had a plantation, these Chinese friends, on Sundays if we happened
to be standing down [didn’t have to fly], they’d [my Chinese friends would] take a bunch
of us out to the race track, horse race track, and that’s how I happened to meet him
[several times].
RV: What would you do for entertainment in Saigon?
DH: Well, we didn’t have much time for entertainment. We’d go down to one of
the cabarets and drink beer. In fact my first night there, when we first arrived, they have
a local beer called, we call it Tuy Hoa, and unfortunately the first night that’s what we were drinking, the next morning when I woke up I had a splitting headache. I tried to sit up and I couldn’t see anything. I thought, oh my god, I’ve gone blind, but in about a few minutes, well then my eyes started focusing, but after that escapade we stuck to the good old American beer.

RV: How many Americans did you see in Saigon?
DH: Well, we would see quite a few, of course the Army [personnel], although it wasn’t admitted, they had quite a build up, and we’d see quite a few soldiers and we’d see quite a few people [Caucasians] in civilian clothes, Americans that I didn’t know whether they were Army just putting on civilian clothes or whether they were intelligence people or what.

RV: Now, this was 1961, and how long did it go, this Hilo Hattie project?
DH: We were there for a year, and the plane that replaced us [the C-97] I don’t know how long they stayed there.

RV: So what did you do after Project Hilo Hattie?
DH: Okay, after Hilo Hattie I came back to the States and let’s see, then I was stationed at, I was assigned to [the SAM squadron at] Randolph Air Force Base, Texas and there I was assigned as the Squadron Administrative Officer, Flight Scheduling Officer, I was a test pilot and also what do you call it, where I had to give other pilots check rides, stuff like that.

RV: You were a flight instructor?
DH: Right.

RV: What planes were you checking out in yourself?
DH: Okay, well there at Randolph and that was a Special Air Mission Squadron too, I was flying the C-47 again, it was called the VC-47 because they were real plushied up, and the VT-29 and the VC-131, which is [almost] the same as the T-29, it’s just a little bit different in the engine.

RV: And how long were you there at Randolph?
DH: At Randolph, let’s see.

RV: This would have been 1962?
DH: Let me check my book here.
RV: While you’re doing that, your note said that you flew seventy-six combat
missions for Hilo Hattie, does that sound about right?

DH: Let’s see I’ve got another paper here I think. Seventy-six, yes.

RV: So, you’re a flight instructor and you’re?

DH: Yes, a flight of standardization and flight evaluation. Yes, I got it now.

RV: And what rank were you at this point?

DH: Let me see, I was a Captain.

RV: And do you know how long you were there at Randolph, ’62 to?


RV: I have here that you were at Bien Hoa in 1968?

DH: Yes.

RV: So you were there?

DH: So, I was, ’68 was when I went back to Southeast Asia.

RV: So that would have been six years at Randolph?

DH: Approximately. [No, four years.]

RV: Okay. You didn’t go anywhere else between Randolph and going back to
Southeast Asia?

DH: No. It was in, let’s see 1968 I was sent down to Hurlbert Air Force Base in
Florida, and it’s in the panhandle, and there I was checked out in the C-123 which they
used for spray missions, and then after we completed our training then we were sent to
the Philippines to go through jungle survival school, and that was about two weeks as I
recall.

RV: How was that?

DH: It wasn’t too bad. We learned, they had these natives [instructors] showing
us how to [survive in the jungle], what plants we could eat and how to cook rice in a
bamboo stick [shoot] and different things. So when we finished there, then we went over
to Bien Hoa.

RV: Were you able to handle all that physically okay?

DH: Yes.

RV: Now when you, going back to Randolph quickly, this is the first time you
had come back to the United States in quite some time.
DH: Right.

RV: How did it feel being back in the United States, did you prefer that?

DH: Well, yes. Of course I enjoyed being stationed in Japan, that was a good assignment, and then Randolph, it’s a beautiful base and of course San Antonio’s a nice sized city and lots to do there. Backing up, when I was first assigned, no it was [before] my second tour in Korea, when I went to Osan, I had to go through survival training at Reno, Nevada, now that was rough. The first week you’re being treated as though you have been captured, and you’re put in these little sweat boxes, different things [expose you to interrogation and threats, etc.], and the last few days of the second week they take you up in the mountains, dump you out and you have, I don’t know how many miles you have to cover to get to the point where they’ll pick you up again. You spend a couple of [days and] nights in the mountains, hiking over, and I learned two things, if you go for a week without eating you get extremely hungry, and if you walk up and down those mountains you get awful tired. So, when I had to go back to Vietnam, to Bien Hoa, of course I was stationed at Randolph, and when Personnel [Sergeant] notified me there, and the Sergeant told me, he’s says, “Oh, you’ve got to go back through survival training.” I said, “No way.” I said, “I don’t mind going back to Vietnam,” but I said, “I will stand a court martial before I will go back through that survival training in Reno.” And he said, “No, you don’t know.” I said, “I most certainly do.” We argued back, finally he picked up the phone, called and said, by then I was a major, and he said, “Major Harp doesn’t have to go back [through survival training],” so they waived it.

RV: So you would have had to go back to Reno?

DH: Supposedly.

RV: But you did go to the Philippines then?

DH: Well, yes that was jungle survival.

RV: So that was much easier?

DH: Yes, yes much easier.

RV: And what other training did they have for you before you went to Bien Hoa?

DH: Well, that was basically all it, but the checking out in the plane down in Florida.

RV: C-133?
DH: Yes, and then the jungle survival training in the Philippines and straight to Vietnam again.

RV: Now, how had Vietnam changed? This was 1968; quite a bit of time had passed.

DH: Yes, quite a bit. Well, of course we were more or less restricted to Bien Hoa. It’s, I don’t know how many miles north of Saigon it is, its, I guess a couple hours drive by Jeep, and the whole time I was there I only got to go into Saigon once, and it was in bad shape then.

RV: What do you mean?

DH: Well, you know garbage around everything. In fact I tried to locate some of my Chinese friends, but never could locate any of them, and one place I talked to they thought that this Charlie Chan had died, but I never could verify that.

RV: What was Vietnam the country like, had it changed a lot since the early ‘60s?

DH: Well, the country, I really couldn’t say much because see when I was first there, like on Hilo Hattie, I didn’t see the country except from the air, and so there at Bien Hoa it was sort of a desolate base, all the trees were dead from, we didn’t spray them on purpose, but just the seepage from taking off and landing, it killed all the greenery around the base and so I really didn’t see much of the country [except from the air we saw a lot of jungle, but the Delta region is desolate].

RV: What did you know of U.S. policy towards Vietnam and the whole Vietnam War, had you kept up with what was happening overseas and the whole thing?

DH: You mean since?

RV: No, like when you came back after Hilo Hattie, you came back into the United States, and did you keep up with what was happening as the war developed?

DH: Yes, of course only through the TV and newspapers was my only source of knowledge there, but.

RV: What did you understand about why the United States was in Vietnam?

DH: Well, to supposedly to protect democracy in South Vietnam, but I don’t know from what I have read about Vietnam and pictures that they’ve shown on TV, sometimes, well I guess I shouldn’t say this, but sometimes I think there are some people
that have to be governed with an iron hand, so I don’t know what [perhaps] they might be
good for. I really couldn’t say unless I could go back and really visit the country.

RV: So, you mean now, better?

DH: Yes.

RV: Okay, so tell me what life was like at Bien Hoa while you were there, what
was the base camp like?

DH: It was sort of miserable. Living conditions were not the best in the world at all. We, they were old French type barracks like, we, the guys in the hooch that I was
living in, we finally managed to salvage this Styrofoam that bombs and [other] things are
shipped in, and that way we were able to seal the walls up with, because the French, they
just had sort of like a lattice thing for ventilation all the way around, but we managed to
get these places sealed up and got us a window air conditioner installed, but it was all just
one open bay barracks, and the water there wasn’t fit to drink. So we had a refrigerator
and usually beer was about the only liquid substance we had, because the water it was
sort of blackish looking.

RV: You didn’t have any purified water brought in for you?

DH: Well, they purified it supposedly, they had a big tank there, a huge tank, but
when you opened to spigot it was, to look at it, you just didn’t felt like consuming it.

And of course the food was not the best in the world.

RV: How many men did you live with in your barracks there?

DH: In the barracks, let’s see. I guess there was, there must have been about ten
of us I would say, around ten.

RV: And your mission was under Operation Ranch Hand, is that correct?

DH: Yes.

RV: You were flying, spraying Agent Orange?

DH: Right.

RV: And your notes say that you flew fifty-nine combat missions doing this,

describe a typical mission.

DH: Okay, well we’d be getting up before daybreak, rush over and try to grab
some breakfast, and then we’d go down to our ops office where we’d be briefed on what
area we were to go to and spray. Then we would don all our paraphernalia which
included a real heavy flight, supposed to have been bullet proof vest, it was real thick, something sort of like heavy fiberglass or some, I don’t know what the material was and [we also took] our helmets, we all carried a sidearm and a carbine.

RV: Okay, the M-1?

DH: M-1, yes.

RV: Did you have any protective gear to wear for the Agent Orange?

DH: No. No they claimed that it wouldn’t hurt us.

RV: All right, so you would get briefed on where you would have to go, you’d get dressed up and then what happened?

DH: Then, we’d go to our assigned aircraft, and start warming up the engines. Usually we’d be anywhere from about six to maybe fifteen airplanes, depending on the area that was to be sprayed. Of course when we sprayed the jungle like that, we would actually have to spray it about three different times. The first time you’d just get the top canopy, then you’d have to wait about maybe three weeks, go back, spray that area again, and then you get the second canopy. Then about three to four weeks later, then you’d go back, spray it again and then you’d get the lower canopy.

RV: Okay, how high did you fly?

DH: Right at treetop level, or you might say, about a hundred feet above the trees?

RV: So you would fly out, how long did your missions typically last?

DH: Well, it would be depending on which area of Vietnam we were flying. Sometimes it might take us maybe just thirty minutes to get to one area, then again, it might take a little over an hour to get to an area.

RV: How long would it take you to do the actual spraying?

DH: Oh, it would only take, it didn’t take too long, I’d say about, of course it seemed a lot longer, but the actually spray run would probably only be maybe five minutes at the most, probably.

RV: Did you ever take any fire from the ground?

DH: Oh, yes you were always getting small arms fire, and in fact the first mission I went on, I had an engine shot out on my first mission. [By this time they had learned to lead the aircraft.]
RV: Were you the pilot?
DH: Yes.

RV: Did they tell you exactly why you were spraying the Agent Orange?
DH: Oh, yes to open, supposedly to open up the jungle so we could, they could find the enemy, but in actuality I think we did the Vietcong and North Vietnamese a big service by opening it up where they could see to travel.

RV: Did you ever fly any missions into Laos or Cambodia, that you are aware of?
DH: No.

RV: And what did they tell you exactly about Agent Orange?
DH: Oh, that, well they just told us that it would kill the plants and things like that, that it wouldn’t hurt us or anything, which was not true.

RV: Did you ever have any direct contact with the defoliant?
DH: Oh, yes. Yes, the fuselage, we had a thousand gallon tank in the fuselage, and of course loading that stuff and everything, it would be spilled all over the fuselage floor, so your boots and everything were covered in it, then when you were spraying, we always had our side windows open, so that you’re flying in formation, so you’re probably getting a mist from the planes ahead of you, but I myself, I haven’t had any ill effects myself that I know of now. Now, my youngest daughter was conceived right after I came back from Vietnam, and she did have some problems, or has some problems. She [was born with vitiligo. That is a total lack of pigment on large areas of her skin], the skin pigmentation in her legs and abdomen has all these white streaks; there has never been a case like that in my family or my wife’s family.

RV: Have you taken, I guess you’ve obviously checked with the doctors and have they been able to determine that it’s exposure or something Agent Orange related illness?
DH: No, the Air Force [Study], in 19, I believe it was 1968, started, ’68 or ’78, I forget, started checking all the pilots, crew members of Ranch Hand, and the first time they checked us they had us come down to Houston, Texas, and after the check up when I got home, I wrote a letter to the Surgeon General and told him, I said, “If you want a correlation,” I said, “the best thing would be to check my two daughters.” I said, “The oldest one was conceived before I went to Vietnam, my second one, which has the problem was conceived right after I came back.” Well, about a month later I got a letter
from, no a phone call from a Lieutenant and said they had a received my letter and
appreciated it, said, but they had all the medical records.
    RV: Meaning they didn’t want to investigate it further?
    DH: Admit in it, no and since, well since Houston they’ve been checking us every
five years out at the La Jolla, California, at the Scripps Clinic, and I’ve always felt like it
was just a whitewash job. The government can’t afford to admit that.
    RV: Financially you mean?
    DH: Financially, right. Because it would just involved too much money, you
consider all the Americans that were exposed to it, not only the Ranch Hand crews, but
the ground crews that were in the areas, that happened to be in some of the areas where
we sprayed, and the Australians, the Vietnamese, and there’s a lot of Vietnamese that are
deformed.
    RV: When did you arrive in 1968?
    DH: When did I arrive?
    RV: Yes, sir.
    DH: Let me check here. I have that date.
    RV: I was wondering if it was before or after Tet?
    DH: Oh, it was before Tet because I was there during Tet.
    RV: Okay, can you describe that experience?
    DH: Well, they hit Bien Hoa, but we had taken our planes and flown them over to
that place on the coast.
    RV: Cam Ranh?
    DH: Cam Ranh, yes. And right after everything was over [the enemy was
eliminated], then we came back.
    RV: How did you, did you know, did someone know that Tet was going to
happen, is that why you got the planes out?
    DH: Yes, right. In fact, well say like the hooch we lives in, the back side was
only about three feet from the fence line separating us from Vietnamese territory, and we
couldn’t get a hold of any constantina wire [accordion barbed wire] to put around there.
Well, fortunately one day I happened to run around an old Army sergeant, and we were
talking and I said, “Man, I’d give a case of Scotch if I could just get a hold of some
constantina wire.” He says, “Where do you want it?” About two days later this big semi-
truck, Army truck, pulls up with a truckload of constantina wire and they unload it for us.
Well, I guess the base commander or somebody called a Squadron commander and he
calls me, “Where did you get that constantina wire?” I said, “Sir, don’t ask.”
RV: Did you have to give up the case of Scotch?
DH: Yes, I was glad to give it to him. But Bien Hoa caught it pretty bad. Of
course they killed an awful lot of Vietcong. I have some pictures that one of the base
photographers gave me of some dead Vietcong all lined up.
RV: What kind of fighting did you experience that night?
DH: Well, see we went over to Cam Ranh Bay with the planes, so we didn’t
experience it. Now, backing up some. We used to, they [the Vietcong] used to lob
mortars in on us periodically. And at first, well we’d jump up and run over to a bunker,
and one of the bunkers, a mortar actually went in and exploded [it killed several airmen],
after that happened I said well, to heck with it. When they’d give this warning, or we’d
hear them [mortars] coming in I’d just grab my mattress and roll over on the floor and put
the mattress over the top of me. I felt I was just about as safe there as anywhere else.
RV: Did you ever experience rocket attacks?
DH: No.
RV: What did you guys do for entertainment on the base there?
DH: Oh, just going up to the club and living it up there, that was about the only
entertainment we had.
RV: Do you remember any of the Doughnut Dollies that were there, the Red
Cross girls?
DH: No. I never saw a Red Cross in action in our area; they might have been in
some other area.
RV: How much were you able to keep up with what was going on at home while
you were there for this year?
DH: Well, just through the Stars and Stripes newspaper and the radio, that was
about it.
RV: And did you have regular contact with your family?
DH: Yes, of course I, when I went to Bien Hoa, I had gotten married while I was at Randolph, and my wife and I, we used to mail tapes back and forth to each other [as well as letters everyday].

RV: Okay, did you ever have any exposure or experience with the USO shows?
DH: No.
RV: How about R & Rs?
DH: Yes, I took an R & R up to Japan and, I guess I was up there for about a week?
RV: Okay, is that the only one you were able to take?
DH: Yes. [No. Before Japan I had gone up to Hong Kong for about four days.]
RV: Did you have a good week up there?
DH: Oh yes, yes I enjoyed it.
RV: How did it effect you when you got back to Vietnam, was it very helpful to go, to get out of the country for a week or?
DH: Oh, yes it was real good to get away from there, get into civilization for a while and have some good food, entertainment.
RV: How much drug use did you see there?
DH: Actually, I myself didn’t see any. Now, I assume that it was, some of them were probably using it, but I myself didn’t see any effects of it.
RV: So, mainly it was just alcohol, drinking?
DH: Yes.
RV: Did you ever experience any racial issues there on base?
DH: No, no I didn’t.
RV: Did you guys have any pets while you were there?
DH: No, I didn’t see any pets around our area.
RV: Did you ever have any contact with ARVN or any of the indigenous forces?
DH: Not while I was at Bien Hoa, well of course our maids, we had a maid that did some of our laundry, and sort of cleaned the hooch.
RV: Did you get to know her at all?
DH: Just casual, yes.
RV: What did you think of the Vietnamese civilians while you were back there in 1968?
DH: Well, I really didn’t come in contact with hardly any of them.
RV: Except just for the cleaning people and maids.
DH: And you know at the Officers’ Club, they had Vietnamese working in there.
RV: Did you ever receive any other training while you were there, on the ground in Vietnam?
DH: No.
RV: And what do you think about, everybody had basically a year tour of duty, and there’s been some criticism of this, after the war about that it’s very, very different from World War Two where people serve until the end of the war. Do you think that would have been doable in Vietnam, if you were stationed there just for the entire war?
DH: I don’t think so. Now, I guess in the Air Force it could have been bearable, but I feel for these Army fellows and Marines that were out on these outposts. I don’t believe they could have held up for too long of a period. I think they really had it rough.
RV: Did you ever have contact with them while you were there?
DH: No.
RV: Just basically what you’ve heard since you left?
DH: Yes, right.
RV: And when did you leave actually, you got your orders I guess, your year was up and?
DH: Yes, I came back in 1969, and I had been, well, as I told you before at Randolph I was Special Air Mission squadron. There were four of these squadrons that supported the four different Army regions, and we would carry the commanding generals [and staff] and then other dignitaries that the Department of Defense would have us pick up different places, fly places. I knew I was coming up pretty soon for retirement, and I was trying to get [transferred] in the Squadron in Atlanta, Georgia, Dobbins [AFB], but instead they sent me to TAC headquarters at Langley [AFB] and made me chief of the four SAM squadrons, which was okay with me. It was sort of an awkward assignment because I was just a Major, and these four squadrons, they had Lieutenant Colonels for
Squadron Commanders, so here’s a major dictating to a Lieutenant Colonel is a little awkward.

RV: Yes, sir. Now, when you left Vietnam did you fly out on a commercial flight or on a military flight?

DH: It was a commercial charter flight.

RV: Okay, what do you remember about that plane flight, when you left and the mood on the plane?

DH: Oh, not an awful left, it was just a real long, tiresome flight because they’ll stop and refuel and change the crew, but you have to stay onboard and sit there for the entire flight.

RV: Right, how did you feel leaving Vietnam?

DH: I was glad to leave. In fact I forget what date I was supposed to leave, but after I had my orders I’d go down and sit by the terminal in case an open seat left and I actually got out about two days early.

RV: Looking back at your Vietnam experience, are there any incidents that happened that really stand out in your mind, either while you were on base at Bien Hoa or when you were flying the Ranch Hand missions?

DH: Oh, no. I will say my first mission in Vietnam, it was enjoyable. Like I said, we weren’t supposed to be there, we were living strictly on the economy, but it was an enjoyable tour. But being at Bien Hoa was just one of those unfortunate assignments that you get once in a while.

RV: Would you change anything about your Vietnam experience if you could? What would it be?

DH: No, I can’t.

RV: Maybe stationed somewhere else?

DH: Yes, the second tour. I would have preferred to stay in the SAM squadron at TACHIE.

RV: Right. When you arrived back in the United States, did you have any difficulties at the airports or your reception back in the United States?

DH: No. I don’t know, some people sort of looked down on us like we never should have been there, but basically I guess it was okay.
RV: How much difficulty, if at all, did you have transitioning back into life here in America, when you got back from Vietnam?

DH: I didn’t have any problems.

RV: You were staying in the military for a couple more years.

DH: Right.

RV: You retired in 1971?

DH: Right.

RV: Did you follow U.S. policy after you got back to the United States, about what was happening on the ground in Vietnam?

DH: Well, through TV and newspapers and all, I kept up with it. I was sorry to see us lose out. I was through.

RV: Okay, how did you feel about the U.S. policy of turning the war over to the Vietnamese, the Vietnamization policy, did you think that they could handle the responsibility or the effort to hold up South Vietnam?

DH: No, I didn’t feel like they could hold out, and I feel like if Washington, once they had committed the military to fighting in Vietnam, if the had only left it up to the field commanders in Vietnam, that we could have probably won, but unfortunately any targets you [the military] wanted to fire on or bomb or anything, you first had to get permission from Washington, and you can’t win a war like that.

RV: Okay, well how did you feel in April 1975 when Saigon fell and South Vietnam fell, do you remember where you were and what you were feeling?

DH: I don’t remember just where I was at, but what you could see on TV about it and all. I really felt sorry for those Vietnamese that had befriended us, because we had no idea what torture they might undergo [or face death].

RV: Do you have any thoughts about Vietnam today?

DH: No, not really. It would be interesting if I could go back and just see what it looks.

RV: Where would you go if you could go back?

DH: Well, I’d like to go back to Saigon and just see what the city looks like now.

RV: Have you been in touch with any Americans or Vietnamese-Americans who made it out of the country and came over here?
DH: No, I haven’t.

RV: When you listen to the radio, do you hear any songs that ever take you back
to your time in Vietnam?

DH: No, not really.

RV: Have you read any good books that you would recommend or you think are
pretty accurate portrayals of what happened in Vietnam?

DH: No, I don’t think of any. I really haven’t read any big books on the action, of
course in Newsweek and U.S. World News and all, I’ve read a lot of articles in those, but
that’s about the extent of it. [A good book I read was Air War-Vietnam by Frank
Harvey.]

RV: Okay, have you seen any movies on Vietnam?

DH: Only on TV. We don’t even have a theater here and the nearest theater is
more than twenty miles away.

RV: Okay, when you see it on TV, what are your feelings and thoughts on the
war, this much time removed from the war?

DH: Gosh, I don’t know. If it shows some shots maybe around Saigon, it really
gets my attention, trying to recognize some of the places, but I can’t say that I have any,
too much feelings either way.

RV: What would you say was the most significant thing that you learned from
your service in Vietnam, both tours included? Not to drink Tuy Hoa beer?

DH: Right.

RV: But seriously, what?

DH: Well, I know one day at the races we had a winning ticket, but we had
thrown the ticket away before we realized it was a winning ticket but I really can’t think
of anything offhand. [If our government sends our military to fight a war, they should let
the field commanders make the vital decisions in order to win the war.]

RV: Do you think the United States learned any lessons from the Vietnam War?

DH: I sure hope they have. Boy, I don’t know whether you heard that racket
going by or not, some guy on a motorcycle racing up and down the street here. What was
your question, then?
RV: What lessons have the United States learned from the Vietnam War, do you think?

DH: Well, I hope they’ve learned that you can’t win a war if you have to depend on getting everything Okayed through Washington first. I think that was more or less proven in Desert Storm. They gave General Schwarzkopf the go ahead and then left him alone, and you see what a wonderful and fast job he did. Unfortunately if we go back into there I’m afraid it’s going to be devastating, because he’s had too many years to build up in anticipation of this.

RV: If you were to tell young people today about the Vietnam War and about your experiences, what would you tell them about Vietnam?

DH: Well, about the only thing I could tell them would be that, they’re a fairly friendly people, and it is a beautiful country, of course it’s been torn up a lot, but I think at one time it was referred to as the pearl of the Orient or something like that, I forget the correct wording, but that’s about all I could say for it. They’re industrious [people].

RV: Have you ever been to Washington DC and to the Vietnam War memorial?

DH: No, I haven’t. [I have been to Washington but not the Memorial.]

RV: Would you like to go someday?

DH: Yes, I think it would be real interesting to see it. Offhand, I really don’t know of any friend that was killed there, but I would like to see the Wall.

RV: You said that every five years the government’s been flying you out to La Jolla to get tested, that’s continuing?

DH: No, this year was the last year.

RV: Okay, do you feel like the government is taking care of its Vietnam veterans?

DH: Not really.

RV: How so?

DH: Well, so much of it they keep denying. Now, I myself [and my wife], if I get sick, I go to a private doctor.

RV: You don’t go to the VA?

DH: No, I don’t go to the VA or to a base. [After the government reneged on its promises of lifetime medical care by canceling Champus, we were forced to take out]
private insurance. We hope that the Tri-care program, along with medicare will someday
be sufficient for us.]

RV: Well, Mr. Harp is there anything else you’d like to talk about or anything
else you’d like to add to this interview?

DH: I can’t think of anything now, maybe when you send me the draft if I think of
anything more I can maybe add to it, but offhand right now I don’t think of anything.

RV: Okay, well we’ll go ahead and wrap it up then and this will end our oral
history interview with Mr. David Harp.