Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Colonel William Anderson. We are at Ft. Walton Beach, Florida, on 22\textsuperscript{nd} of September 2000 at 8:45. Colonel Anderson would you begin by giving a brief biographical sketch of your early life?

William Anderson: I was born and raised in Meadville, Pennsylvania, which is south of Lake Eerie in the northwestern part of the state in Pennsylvania. I went to high school there and started college there at Allegheny College. Finished up the first year and it was into the second half, half of the second year, when the Korean War was getting pretty hot and heavy. I was advised that I was coming up to the top of the draft list so my choice was to into the Army or the Air Force and I decided that I kind would like to into the Air Force. So I enlisted and came into the service in January of 1951. Served and went through basic training in southern Texas, Lackland in Wichita Falls and my first assignment was up to Columbus, Ohio and Westover, Massachusetts and I was a gunsight mechanic in a F86 outfit there. Of course I didn’t have much college degree and I always had wanted to fly and one of my supervisors suggested that I apply for pilot training and so I did and got accepted and started pilot training in ’52, graduated and got my wings in 1953. From there I went to San Marcos Texas to teach Army officers how to fly for three years and accumulated a lot of time in a short duration and got a chance to go to B-47s when they closed up the base in San Marcos and got into the bomber business in SAC.
and stayed in the bomber business in SAC flying B-47s and B-52s various locations and then the Vietnam war was going strongly and 1967 I got an assignment to go to Vietnam. It was kind of an interesting assignment, it had been a while since I had flown fighters so I had to go back through F100 gunnery school at Luke because in order to be a FAC (Foward Air Controller) and control American troops you had to be a fighter pilot qualified. Be current in the gunnery range and current on tactics so I had to go back through that school. After I finished up the training at Luke, we went to Counterinsurgency school here at Hurlburt and another kid and I, a young captain, I was a major at the time, we got assigned to go to Ft. Lewis, Washington to train with an Army battalion that was getting ready to Vietnam and the purpose of this program was to kind of educate the Army people on how to use air power. Many of them didn’t know how to use it, some of they were afraid of it and dangers of it. So our job was to teach this battalion and then with the idea that we would go to Vietnam with this battalion and eventually work with them in country. This was about the time that the TET Offensive was starting in ’68 so when we went to Vietnam the battalion was suppose to go to Chu Lai which is in northern I Corps but the got diverted at sea to help out in the Saigon area for the TET Offensive so we never did work with that battalion. But we ended up and got checked out in O-2s aircraft in country and then went to Chu Lai. Where we worked with the Americal Division. I was the largest Army division ever formed. I served as the assistant division ALO for about two months with Americal, which was pretty interesting because it got familiar with all the area of the Mercal Division and then I went to the 11th Brigade and served as the ALO for the 11th Brigade and for the rest of my year in tour which was about eight months left.

SM: What did you think of that project to integrate air assets with a battalion and training before going to Vietnam.

WA: It was excellent. It gave them an awful amount of confidence. The Army people on the ground in the areas that we worked, they had to call on you for air support when they were in trouble when they were in a firefight and they had to have confidence that you knew what you were doing and that the fighters that you were putting in knew what they were doing. I found that what we did in the Americal Division was kind of a big contrast to some other FACs that I have talked to where the Army people were afraid
to put in air around them for fear that they would get hit. The Army people that we
worked with were just the opposite, they had no fear in fact we had to go to the other
extreme to convince them that you can’t put in napalm fifty meters from them that is to
close you have to back up. They had in their minds that the Air Force would never miss a
target and so it was a reverse education problem for us, we had to convince them
sometimes they are really not that good all the time so you’ve got to be very careful.
That happen many times with me and sometimes they would lie to you. You’d tell them
to move back and they said we’ve moved back and then you’d drop in the ordnance on
the target and then have them mark their position again and they’d never moved.

SM: Did that ever result in friendly casualty?
WA: We never had any but we were close but in most cases you know they were
satisfied with it but we had to be careful that they didn’t lie to us and we’d make them
mark their position and we’d make them mark it again (?). But the primary duty when
you were a forward air controller that was different then a lot of the other, the coveys and
the nails and those they fill in country in Laos and Cambodia and they really did not work
with the people on the ground that much unless they happen be there. When we took off
for our missions we had to know where every battalion and every company were in the
field and they’d be scattered throughout the jungle and back in on the coast and you had
to know where they were and you made contact with each of those units everyday and
then if they got in trouble they would call you and we would have troops in contact
everyday in someplace. You would bring in air strikes and you’d call in the air mark the
target, they’d tell you what kind of a situation they had on the ground and then you would
work the air strikes. The forward air controller had complete authority over ordnance
that was put in country, nobody could put in ordnance without approval of a FAC or at
least in our division area. Then we each brigade was assigned Special Forces camps that
they were responsible for supporting. The 11th Brigade we has six Special Forces camps
that we would occasionally visit and we were there back support. We had many
firefights with Viet Cong and NVA trying to over run one of those outposts, which were
manned by green berets. Primarily special forces camp was about five or six green berets
and then maybe a thousand civilian irregular defense forces and it was their job to give
them, the green berets job to give them a fortified position and help train them and to
defend their village. So a lot of our activity was in that area. I was fortunate that, and I
think maybe it might have been unique within the Americal division at least it was in the
11th Brigade. The Brigade commander flew his command and control helicopter from
daylight to dark everyday. He checked on every unit that he had in the field and if he had
a unit that was in firefight or that needed help, he would evacuate wounded with his
helicopter. Well you wanted a forward air controller within when he flew those missions,
so I had four FACs assigned to the Brigade. One of us would fly one week out of every
month within his command and control choppers. So it was very interesting. Many
times when we’d get left on the ground because there was not enough room in the
chopper for the wounded to haul out so we’d stay on the ground and sometimes I’d stay
on for two days before they ever could get back in to get me out. So ended up fighting on
the ground with the Army and that was an interesting experience.

SM: Let’s take a step back because I want to come back to those experiences
because that sounds pretty unique especially from a FAC prospective to be actual on the
ground and be fighting. The training that you received when you first went into the Air
Force and as your training progressed as an officer and a pilot, how would you evaluate
that training, do you think in the various stages of your Air Force career the training was
adequate to the task?

WA: Yes it was. Of course what we had to do in Vietnam as a forward air
controller is very specialized and so the Air Force training up until that point hadn’t
focused in that kind of thing. I had been flying bombers and now I’m going to go down
and fly fifty feet off the ground at one hundred-twenty mile an hour and give air support
to the amount of people on the ground. So yes it was completely different kind of
training.

SM: The kind of reergnty training that received here at Hurlburt Field –
WA: That gave me an idea of what it was going to be like over there, but like any
training it’s a little different than when you actually get your feet on the ground.

SM: That was in 1967 that you received that training here. Do you remember
much about the course work and what they discussed in terms of – by that time they have
to be integrating information from Vietnam from the field, from other FACs that are
flying here from other Air Force pilot special operations missions and in support of
special operations, do you remember any specific things they told you about Vietnam that stick out?

WA: Very little specifics about in country. It was primarily focused around troop movement, however the troops would normally on the ground. What the terrain was like, map reading, being able to locate yourself. No radio nav-aids so you had the coordinates of a ground unit and your out in the middle of sometimes triple canopy jungle and you have to be pretty good at map reading in order to figure out where their at.

SM: I would imagine the use of very prominate terrain features and things of that nature was complex, from the air that much easier. What about the political and social aspects of the insurgency and of counter insurgency and specifically what were happening in Vietnam? Was there much discussion of the ends and outs of the complexities of Vietnam?

WA: Some trying to describe to us what the political atmosphere was. In the south they were contending with guerilla type the Viet Cong and one of the problems in that area that the Viet Cong didn’t have uniform, he might be hoeing in a rice paddies one minute and the next minute he is carrying a AK-47 and shooting at you and so it was very unusual that you distinguish. Some of the time you pick them would pick them up and we’d pick them up in a helicopter, what we call military aid males so you figured that the individual was either, he was the right age and he should be either in the south Vietnamese Army or he was a Viet Cong and so you’d pick them up and you could tell them some of them would be loaded calluses across the tops of their shoulders from carrying packs and stuff on the trail. Then say this guy was either a Viet Cong or hauling for them. That was the most difficult problem. You always heard of after the war and during the war about innocent civilians. It was pretty hard to find and distinguish innocent civilians. Everybody has this story of the little kids that threw hand grenades in the shoebox and stuff like that and that went on. Roads would be mined, the next morning after they swepted and there would be a little Hooch right across the street from where the mine went off and blew up one of vehicles and the people would say no I didn’t see anything. Most of the time they responded like that out of fear. Because in country at night the Viet Cong owned an awful lot of villages. During the day they would be out of there, but they’d be in getting supplies at night and a great deal of fear
from the people and you could sympathize with then because there was nobody there to
protect them so they better go along with them. So it was very difficult to find that, to
really know who were the good guys and who were the bad guys.

SM: What about prior to that training and in terms of your own political
awareness through the news or magazines and other measures, perhaps other officers and
personnel that you met that had come back from Vietnam. What did you think personally
based on that information what was going on in the Vietnam. Why was the United States
involved?

WA: Well we thought we were involved and I’d rather not get into the political
aspects. Do you feel that a country that was not able to defend itself was being overrun
or infiltrated by a communist led group? That was our feeling very similar to what we
had achieved in Korea and the situation there and that primarily you concerned with
helping these people defend themselves if they in fact they wanted to be defended and
that was the feeling that we had.

SM: Has your perspective regarding that particular aspect, has it changed over
time in terms of just your knowledge of works of history and documentations and things
like that has been revealed or come out since then?

WA: No I don’t think so. I think they did not want to be infiltrated by the
communist but I don’t think they had any choice, it was just to overwhelming for them to
fight and you know they had to survive. In Vietnam and Indochina had been going
through this for so long, I remember one time we were planning a support mission for the
South Vietnamese Army movement and it was suppose to be a weekend planning session
and it started on a Friday and we worked all day Friday and at five o’clock Friday night
we were just into the meat of things getting going and all the South Vietnamese officers
got up out of the meeting and left and we said, ‘Where are they going?’ and we said,
‘They are going home to their families for the weekend and they’ll be back Monday
morning and we’ll go on.’ We were quite upset and we said, ‘What is going on” and they
said, ‘You’ve got to remember they have been doing this for twenty years and what’s
another day?’ So you know they had an attitude and can understand what they had been
going through.
SM: That brings up an interesting point. In terms of the American policy of rotation and every person having a three hundred and sixty-five day tour and people signing up for additional tours and spending more time in country, but majority of Americans it was a one year tour. There is the old cliché now that we fought Vietnam – we didn’t fight a twelve year or fifteen year war, we fought a one year war fifteen times or whatever – whereas the Vietnamese experience was quite different and they were there for the duration. How much of an impact do you think that had and what is your personal view of that rotation system, do you think it was adequate to the task of what we were trying to accomplish?

WA: I don’t think you do quite as good a job when you have to rotate. However, I was married and I had three children. For me, a year was long enough to spend there. Unlike World War II where guys were gone for three years, I think there is pro and cons to both ways. I think since some of the soldiers from World War II we were really burnt out after the first or second year and maybe not nearly as affected. You know they say that a war or a battle, that about one percent of your people do any fighting. The rest of them are hunkering down and trying to save themselves. From some of the battles I have seen and been involved with on the ground that was kind of the way it is. Very small percentage of the people is really doing the fighting and those people did burn out pretty quick.

SM: In terms of what you think know as a senior member of the a senior officer, do you think a rotation system like we implemented in Vietnam is militarily effective and/or regardless of the military effectiveness, we have to take the political considerations into account?

WA: Yes, I think the rotation is the best way to go because you always have if you’ve got younger people and with maybe no families they can certainly volunteer to stay in to do another tour. They would become very valuable instruments in training other people and training the new people. But I think you almost have to have a rotation.

SM: When you got to Vietnam, why don’t you go ahead and describe your actual trip over. When you left the United States, what did your family think? First of all when you learned you were going to Vietnam, did you volunteer to go?

WA: Yes.
SM: What did your family think? You’re a husband, you’ve got three children, a lot of uncertainty and concern I’m sure, and then describe the trip over

WA: When I decided I was going to go we had an awful a lot of friends that were going at the same time and I had decided and it’s very frustrating. I had spent at that time nearly twenty years in your training to be an effective combat weapon but you never get to find out if you really are. I’d pulled sixteen years of alert with a nuclear weapon and a year of deterrent and your sitting there and you think, well you know I have been trained to do this and this is all I’ve ever done is this, is train for this and I don’t know if I can really do it. Of course going to Vietnam then was a little different and you got and put into to action what you have been training for and it was kind of a test really. Family wasn’t too upset. Flying is not the safest profession and I had been flying all over the world in bombers and so the family had kind of adjusted to that and they figured that the Vietnam thing was something that we needed to do. So they were very supportive.

When I flew over to Vietnam we landed in Saigon, my first doctrination was getting off the airplane we went into what would be your base operations and about half of the building was blown away because the TET was in progress and so it was a very desolate looking kind of place. When I checked in I told the guy where I was going at the Chu Lai, which was up the northern I Corps, and I had no idea where it was. He said, ‘No you are going to NKP in Thailand,’ and I said, ‘No I can’t, because I just got done training with this Army unit in the States and the purpose were to stay together,’ and we argued for a few minutes and then finally and he said, ‘You can go to Chu Lai if you want to, I don’t care.’ Then I said, ‘Do you mind telling where it is?’ and he said, ‘It’s up north,’ and I said, ‘How do I get there?’ and he said ‘Go on that flight line and see if you can catch a plane going that way.’ So you were pretty much on your own, if it weren’t for collecting your pay you probably could have stayed hid for a whole year over there. So then we landed at Da Nang and that was where our headquarters of 20th TASS was and then they call down to Chu Lai and somebody came up in a O-2 and picked me up and flew me back down into Chu Lai. It was an interesting transition there.

SM: What were your first impressions coming off the aircraft at – I assume it was Tan Son Nhut airbase. What were your first impressions getting off that plane when you landed in March of ’68?
WA: Well I was concerned, cause it’s like getting off an airliner at a passenger
terminal and half of that place is blown away, we kind of wondered this place is not
secure what is going on here and we lost control and of course the TET was in full
progress and we had lost control.

SM: That brings up an interesting point, militarily and politically and also with
regard to the media and of course just prior to you leaving in late ’67 in November of ’67,
General Westmoreland had come back to the United States and had been giving briefings
to Congress and the President and in front of the media and had been stating that the light
is at the end of the tunnel and this war will be over soon, we’ve all but won and then
January ’68 TET hits. You landed in March of ’68 and half the airport is blown away.
What were your impressions in terms of the military leadership and even the political
leadership? And here you are getting thrown in the middle of this in such an interesting
period of the war, and of course the turning point in terms of the political will of the
United States, and a lot of people alleged that is when the United States decided that they
didn’t want to fight this war anymore.

WA: We were shocked I think is probably at the extent of the TET Offensive but
then we gradually learned that this was expected and that was a big offensive. Many
people consider the TET Offensive as kind of a victory that turned us around and it really
wasn’t, it was a defeat for them because it almost completely made the Viet Cong action
ineffective. They expended almost all of their resources and were solemnly whipped; it
took a little while after the TET to get them calmed down. But it completely – no, nearly
annihilated all the Viet Cong forces. Now the NVA was still ineffective but most of them
were north and they hadn’t come down yet. So in effect it was a victory for our forces
over there because it was the last time that they really had any effective action against
any American troops or the South Vietnamese in country without the help of the North
Vietnamese coming down. If we had closed the trail the North Vietnamese wouldn’t
have been able to come down.

SM: The distinction being it was definitely a military victory for American forces
in Vietnam but the political repercussions and Johnson himself deciding not to run for re-
election shortly there after. Shortly after you arrived in country an indication that maybe
this was a political defeat for the United States.
WA: Already at that time there were still conflicts in what kind of a war that we were fighting over there. Whether we were going to fight a defensive war to merely set and hold and protect the South Vietnamese or were we going to expand and go after the Viet Cong and the NVA. Those two attitudes swapped several times in ’67, ’68 and ’69.

SM: What did you think when you heard Johnson had decided not to run for re-election.

WA: Nothing.

SM: Did it faze you at all?

WA: No.

SM: Describe your first experiences at Da Nang and when you finally met your unit in Chu Lai.

WA: Not too much action at Da Nang, I think the first night we got a rocket attack and mortar attack and then we found out where the nearest bunker was from where you were sleeping and you headed for it. Chu Lai was a beautiful area, probably the most pristine beaches I have ever seen. It would be a great resort area. But everything was pretty well organized. It was the largest Army unit in country, plus there was a Navy unit there that had the swift boats that ran river and then there were two Marine air groups stationed there. It was a pretty good-sized base.

SM: When you arrived in country and also when you arrived at the unit, what kinds of briefings did you receive in terms of rules of engagement interacting with the Vietnamese things like that.

WA: We had very little contact with the Vietnamese. Rules of engagement we discussed and initially the briefings were based on who was where and what your drops going to be. Very little contact, I only got off the base one at Chu Lai and that was to look for a Marine that had been kidnapped, but that was the only time I got off the base. We had very few Vietnamese workers on the base, unlike some others FACs had Vietnamese girls that cleaned their hooches and stuff and we had none of that and we had no contact with them. So I had very little contact with them except at staff meetings with Vietnamese Army officers occasionally.

SM: Was the absence of Vietnamese hooch maids, was that part of the unit policy or was that…?
WA: That was unit policy.

SM: They just didn’t want Vietnamese on the base?

WA: Yes. It was easy to get mortar ordnance and rockets, unlike bases in other countries, we’d get rocketed and mortared three or four times a week.

SM: What about Vietnamese barbers, did you have any in your compound?

WA: I guess we did at the BX I think there was one.

SM: That seems to be a commonplace at the BXs.

WA: BX on the base employed locals.

SM: Was there any suspicion while you were there that a few Vietnamese that who were employed were Viet Cong?

WA: It could have been but I just stayed away from them. Like I said if one was a barber and I got a haircut then that was the closest I ever got to them.

SM: Why don’t you describe the first mission that you went on with the unit there?

WA: I wrote a story about one of them but the first couple of missions were just orientation, you’re out trying to find all of the units and getting familiar with the terrain. The terrain around Chu Lai, you started with a low beach area, then you went into rice paddies and then you got into mountains and then over the mountain range was triple canopy jungle so we had all kinds of terrain and you needed to be familiar with it. Of course no Nav Aids, so you had to figure out how to get to different locations in bad weather at night. My first mission by myself was Easter Sunday in 1968 and I was working along the river and there was an Army company that was going to move through the village and they called me and wanted me to go down and look the village over because it looked kind of quiet and they were suspicious. I went down and made a couple of low passes and didn’t see anybody and I told the company commander, I said, ‘That doesn’t look good, because there should be some people down there and there is nobody down.’ He said, ‘We are going to move through, so keep us in contact with us.’ But what was interesting about this unit is all their call signs were from the TV series Gunsmoke. The company commander was Mr. Dillon, one was Chester and one was Doc and that was their call sign on the radio. They started moving through the village and I can remember all of a sudden they were ambushed and there was a big firefight. I can
remember this radio operator calling he and me said Mr. Dillon, Chester is hit, Doc’s hit we are all hit. So I called in some gunship support for them and also some helicopters to evacuate the wounded. But they had walked into that ambush there in that little village right along the edge of the river. But that was my first experience and I’ll never forget that the call signs….

SM: Was that typical, this was Special Forces unit.
WA: No.
SM: Oh, this was just a standard Army unit okay. Was that typical your interaction with the Army units, you would fly those types of missions?
WA: That was all, there was so much different than the Nails and the Coveys. I mean everyday, if a unit started moving on the ground they would let you know and then you would go out and cover for them.
SM: The briefings that you would receive for those missions, how effective were they in term of assessing enemy, potential enemy contacts, enemy weapons systems things like that?
WA: Well they were primary fighting VC and unless it was a very big operation and he didn’t get involved with the NVA so the VC was normally small groups and so you didn’t expect any large group engagement, but normally small group ambushes. But as the units moved through, you got up everyday at the Brigade we got a morning briefing on where all our units were and what they were going to do that way, if they were going to move and if they thought the potential enemy were and you would base your flying on that and stay within radio contact at all time. Then if they got in trouble, they’d call you and you’d immediately go to do that area and support them, call in air strikes, lots of air strikes and have worked targets of where they are in contact and as many as eight sets of fighters, eight sets of four orbiting at altitude and you are trying to bring them down and keep track of their fuel and what they got in order to put them in on their targets.
SM: Back to that mission where you just described where the unit was ambushed, did you then bring in some air power?
WA: Yes, we brought in some helicopter gunships in.
SM: They came in and dropped their ordnance, was there another ground patrol
that went into the village afterwards to access the situation or?
WA: No, not that particular day. They might have gone in later on that I’m not
aware of but we primarily got that unit out. I directed them to the nearest landing site,
where we got to pick choppers and they went in and evacuated them.
SM: Was anybody killed?
WA: There was one or two killed, a company commander lost a leg and a couple
got wounded.
SM: What size unit – American unit actually went into that?
WA: It was an Americal unit.
SM: About what size?
WA: About thirty people.
SM: A platoon. Any idea what size unit they came in contact with?
WA: Probably twenty I would guess.
SM: Just a good ambush.
WA: And it was ambushed from both sides, along the river and the jungle and on
the other side. We worked a lot with LRRP Teams, I’m not sure if you are familiar with
those Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol. That was another group that you keep track of
each day, where they were inserted. You couldn’t give away their positions so you had to
be very cautious. I had a few friends that I got to know that were on LRRP Teams and I
used to bug them, because they would always whisper at you and I’d whisper back and
that would make them mad because they are in the jungle, they don’t know where the VC
is, so they are on the radio and they are whispering and I’ll whisper back at them and they
would get mad and they would tell me to speak up. But I checked in and I got a call from
one group one day, they said what it would take to get them out of there, that they were
bee-stung and I didn’t know what they were talking about and they would run into a bee
tree, five or six of them but I can’t remember know, but they had got stung up so bad that
none of them could see cause their faces were all swollen and they dropped their weapons
cause they panicked when they – so they didn’t know where their weapons were, they
didn’t know where they were.
SM: They couldn’t see –
WA: So I found a clearing not to far away from them and the only thing that I could do is I would make several passes around and then I would make a pass and say know this is the way to go and I would make a pass over and toward the clearing and so they would start moving that way and finally go them into the clearing and got a chopper in to pick them up, but they were in bad shape and they couldn’t see, their eyes were swollen shut and faces. That was a weird one.

SM: That’s horrible. I never heard of anything like that.

WA: That was another group of people that you had to keep track of in addition to all the Army units and the Special Forces camps and you had to keep track of these LRRP patrols. In occasion we’d put in night ambush patrols, in fact at one time I went in on the chopper and we put in a five man team, that was going to set up a night ambush, not to far from Duc Pho and we had to over a mountain range to get them in, so the next day we got a call from them and during the night one of them had got them up to relieve himself and one of the other guys saw him and shot him and the guy that did the shooting then went berserk cause he killed one of his buddies, and so they didn’t want to extract the team,. Well there was a big storm and rain and about a hundred foot ceiling right down in there and they wanted us to go back and get them out before they got exposed, so I went with the chopper pilot cause I had gone with the first time and they thought I could help him and when he went back in it was so bad that we were right on the tree tops and we’d go up the side of the mountain right on the tree tops and when they get to the top we’d turn around and back and down the other side and stay along the tree tops because that is the only way you could see where you are going and so went in and evacuated and two of them out and the other three decided they wanted to stay in ambush, so they stayed another night.

SM: Did they make contact that you know?

WA: I think they did.

SM: Real quick question, you brought up the bees and that’s kind of an interesting issue, were their any other problems with wildlife in your unit, amongst either that you had or others members of your unit that had besides that one incident with the bees?

WA: No.
SM: Tigers or anything like that?
WA: Saw a lot of water buffalo and deer, but no, saw any tigers, a few snakes –
SM: No snake bites or?
WA: No never heard of anybody getting snake bit.
SM: Just out of curiosity, you mentioned that one of the of course your primary
mission, your primary role was direct all the air power that was in the air and you
mentioned that at times you’d have up several teams of air craft just waiting to bring
ordnance on target. Did you find or did you use both Navy and Air Force air and if so
did you find that were any differences or issues – different issues that you had to deal
with, with each other – with each one of those Navy versus Air – yeah Air Force?
WA: We used Navy, Air Force and Marines a lot of Marines and really you went
by aircraft as far as what you knew what kind of capabilities each aircraft had. That
would determine how close you’d put in ordnance to your troops on the ground
depending on the airplane. For example, the F100 you could put Napalm in very close, to
friendly, they were very accurate with Napalm. If you wanted Hi Drag bombs, seven
hundred fifty pound bombs close, then you would want to use an F4 if you had it. Cause
they were accurate with their Hi Drags and stray F4s and 100s would do it. Some of the
airplanes a Marine had they A6s and the A4s, they were good but they were very limited
on how much – the A4 were very limited on how much ordnance they could carry so they
expended their ordnance pretty quick and you know, they weren’t very effective in
certain target areas. The only airplane that I had trouble with was the A7 when they first
got over of there, they had just come out with it. I think was probably a good airplane but
they said the pilots weren’t that familiar with it and so they weren’t ready. We put in
bombers and B-57s low and a few 105s from up North, when they got diverted would
come down and we’d put them down and we’d put them in. We did not like to put the
105s in, anybody that was used to going north didn’t want to go low and we didn’t want
them dropping bombs from five thousand feet and we wanted them down on the deck
where we could see them. The B57s in the Canberras drop below high probably from
three thousand feet and we didn’t like that too well because you give them a mark and at
a target and you got troops anywhere near by and it’s a long flight time with the bombs
and sit there and watch them go and your not sure where they are going to go so you were
selective on the types of air craft not what service was flying them.

SM: What about – the reason I ask – I interviewed a FAC. He mentioned that
one of the problems or one of the issues that he had to juggle was Air Force jets would
come in heavy on fuel and sometimes you had to leave them burning their fuel because
they would get resupplied, refueled in the air where as Navy aircraft would come in low
on fuel because they are coming in from the aircraft carriers and so you got to get the
Navy guys to drop their ordnance and they don’t have very much loiter time and you’ve
got Air Force that have too much fuel and they cannot effectively conduct the mission till
they burn some of it off, I was wondering if you ever run into some of those types of
issues or problems?

WA: No, whenever fighters checked in with you the first thing you would ask is
what is your fuel state? Once they told you what their fuel was, then regardless of they
were you stacked them up depending on what their status – some you may have three or
four sets stacked up and another flight would check in low on fuel, where you would hold
these guys and you’d put that one in right away. You hated to send anybody back home
with ordnance –

SM: Because they had to drop in the water especially if they were Navy of where
they were landed. Was there a particular aircraft or was there a particular ordnance that
you preferred to have on hand for jungle fighting?

WA: You like Napalm, you like 750 pound high drags and of course you used a
lot of strafe but – that was about it – I FACed and I had them put in two thousand ponders
and make big holes on the ground, but primarily when you support ground troops you
don’t need anything that big and you want something accurate –

SM: You said the one hundred would go to Napalm, correct?

WA: That was my favorite.

SM: What made them better at dropping Napalm than the F-4s does you knows?

WA: It was the aircraft a little more stable maybe at low, I flew one hundreds and
they are pretty stable when they get below and it’s hard to say.

SM: Did you fly F-4s as well?
WA: No, I never flew F4s but they were the best all around fighter pilot that I ever put in was flying an F4. But some of them just depended on primarily flying the aircraft rather than what the branch the pilot was flying in.

SM: How close could bring an F4 with seven hundred fifty pound drag?

WA: Within a hundred meters.

SM: What about Napalm?

WA: With Napalm you bring them into fifty. But you get shrapnel from flying in the seven fifty so you didn’t want to bring them in any closer. Those were the rules you try to go by sometimes when guys on the ground are throwing hand grenades at each other and they are begging you to – like I say I brought a set of Napalm one time and our guys marked their spot and I knew where the bad guys were and I said, ‘Are you too close? Move back,’ and he said okay, then he called me about five minutes later and he said, ‘Okay, we’ve moved back,’ and then we put in a Napalm and then I said ‘Give me another mark on the position,’ and he hadn’t moved a foot.

SM: Did that happen a lot?

WA: Not a lot but they were extremely confident on the accuracy of the fighter planes, sometimes too confident.

SM: More confident than you were?

WA: Yes.

SM: At the same time you said that there were no friendly causalities as a result of air support that you brought in on target?

WA: We had one short round in the eleventh brigade in the whole that I was there and that was from a B-57 that was dropping pretty high and he had a short round. Some of the biggest problems, you were the boss and you had to tell the fighters how to run on the target and sometimes to them, the way you wanted them to run on the target was not a good way to run. Sometimes into a mountain and sometimes down over the top of the mountain but they didn’t realize that their were friendlies left and right and they couldn’t run the other way and sometimes you’d get into arguments on and you tell them, you run it the way I tell you or you go home with your bomb cause you are not dropping – I sent a wing commander home one time, I drop the rest of his flight. It was a three four run flight drop, but he wouldn’t run it like I wanted him to so I sent him high and dry
and I put the rest of the flight in, and you know you’ve got friendlies and to them that
might be the best way to run a target, but they don’t know where the people are on the
ground.

SM: Right, and you don’t have time when you’ve got guys – you’ve got guys on
the ground that are taking fire and they some help and you don’t have time to sit there
and explain every single thing to every single fighter pilot.

WA: The first thing you do is you brief the target to flight and it helps if you’ve
got something stacked up there, they are all listening and so they are paying attention and
you brief them and you tell them where the friendlies are and then you swing them and
you mark the target and you make sure they identify where you have marked and then
they act then you tell them what direction you want them to go and this particular flight
with that wing commander I briefed him and he come in and here he comes in the other
way and I said go high and dry you are not clear and so he pulled up and he said that is
the only way to run it and he said you go high and dry and if the rest of your flight wants
to run it the way I’m briefing, but that happened occasionally.

SM: Was their a particular – did you find that more amongst Air Force pilots
versus Marine or was that kind of across the board?

WA: Well, I think across the board. Any pilot is looking at a target on the
ground and he knows what looks to him what the best way to run the target. You know
some of them, the only way to run the target was pretty hairy and you tell the guy, if you
don’t want to run it fine. But that is the only way we can drop the air is to run it that way.
Ninety-nine times out of hundred they say fine we can do it. Very seldom did I get any
static, I only sent that one guy high and dry in a whole year.

SM: In terms of hitting your smoke, how difficult and did you have much
problem with getting guys to adjust off your smoke if your smoke was not necessarily
directly on target.

WA: Not usually, you get irritated some times, but you only had sixteen rockets
and sometimes about half of those would be operational, another words the firing pins
would be broken off, so you only had half of that loaded to start with. So you are going
to fly four hours and you maybe put in eight, ten sets of fighters, so you only mark so
many times, then you run out of smoke and so sometimes you get irritated if you had a
couple flights holding and they wouldn’t be paying attention to where you would mark it
or you would mark and the leader say, ‘Well, I didn’t get that mark and mark again,’
well, you only had so many and then he get down and you run out of the rockets and then
you are down to fifty feet off the ground trying to drop a smoke grenade out the window
and that gets a little more and so the biggest problem was trying to conserve your smoke
and normally on a target you try to get Napalm in first because if you could get
something burning on the ground, then you had a mark that was better than your smoke
and so that is what you try to do. But the same thing at night to if you put in targets at
night you couldn’t see the smoke at night so you drop log flares and you get a log flare
going and then you try and get Napalm in or something that would get in burning and
then you had another mark that would be – but they were pretty good.

SM: The reason that I ask, I was talking a couple of gentlemen yesterday and
they had mentioned that there would seem to be, maybe a good way to put it, smoke
fixation and where the pilot would come fix where the smoke was and ignore the
adjustments and just drop ordnance right on the smoke.

WA: I never ran into that problem. The only position, of course the secret was
too as accurate as you could be with your smoke. But lots of time you’d put your smoke
in and then the situation would change and you’d have to move them. With the ground
guy and our troops would say, okay they are moving back this way and we need to adjust
and then you would have to adjust from there.

SM: This was O-2s that you flew – what did you use as a sight for your smoke
rockets?

WA: You take a grease pencil and make a mark on the windshield for where you
saw it and –

SM: Same thing for the O-1 basically?

WA: Then they drop a smoke grenade and when you would drop a B-52 off the
ground and when your left wheel passed over the target and you dropped a smoke
grenade.

SM: Did you employ Skippy bombs? The grenades in Skippy peanut butter jars?

WA: Yes, in fact I had my mother send me a couple of boxes of pint jars.
SM: Did she? That was again a mechanism of close air support or was that for
the smoke grenades as well?
WA: No that was primarily for troops on the ground, when they got in trouble,
you could get behind where the bad guys were and start dropping grenades on them and
you had to have the jar, otherwise they would explode in the air.
SM: When you had to do that, did you find that to be somewhat effective? Did
you get feedback from the guys on the ground, that, ‘Hey, this is really messing up the
enemy and making them take cover and every thing else,’ and that gave them time to
withdraw or whatever?
WA: There was a patrol of about six people that had a VC with them, he was
going to show them an animal stash and they had to forge a river and it was one of first
cab and they had the armored personnel carrier that couldn’t cross the river and so they
had to cross at the river, these guys floored the river and they kept calling me and this
guys says it just further – just a little bit further and finally they got a ways from the river
and they got into an ambush and they took off and I dropped some grenades that way,
there was about ten VC chasing these guys down the trail and they used up all my Willie
Petes and all my smoke rockets, run them off the trail. But I’d fire a couple of them and
they’d get off the trail and I’d give the guys a little more time to run away from them.
Then I would go into a side forward slip and fire my M16 out the window and get them
off the trail and then I would drop a few of the grenades where the pint jars and they got
across the river and they met me at the club that night and buying me drinks and they
were pretty happy that they got back to their armored personnel carrier.
SM: Why don’t you go ahead and describe, you mentioned earlier that there was
a time where you were actually on the ground fighting, why don’t you describe the events
leading up to that and how that came about and the action itself.
WA: Several times we would go in to evacuate wounded and many times we
couldn’t get the dust off helicopters to come in because the ground fire was too heavy and
they wouldn’t come in without gunships and so the brigade commander would take his
command and control ship and evacuate wounded out of that. Many times the dead and
the wounded that he was evacuating filled up the chopper. So there was two or three of
us that were with him and we’d get off and we’d stay on the ground and several times –
one time we didn’t get back for two days, the chopper broke down after we had got back
and the VC had attempted to overrun it was on a little hill and the VC attempted to
overrun the hill during the night and we had to fight them off, but there was several cases
like that.

SM: Do you remember where that particular incident occurred or when?
WA: No I sure don’t.
SM: What unit were you with at that point do you recall?
WA: I was with the 11th Brigade. I don’t know what the company was or the
battalion it was.
SM: Did the unit sustain any casualties that night when you tried to overrun it?
WA: It was interesting when the guys that were trying to overrun it started up off
as – we had some perimeter wire that had got through there, but none of them had any
weapons. They had knifes and satchel charges but no other weapons and we killed two
or three of them.
SM: Anybody wounded in your unit?
WA: Yes, a couple of guys.
SM: From the satchel charges?
WA: Not from the satchel charges; a couple of them got stabbed and they got into
bunkers and got the guys. I don’t know whether they were afraid of losing what weapons
they had if they didn’t get back out. But they made – they figured they travel a lot faster
but they were primarily throwing grenades and satchel charges.
SM: Sounds like a suicide mission almost. To penetrate a position with nothing
but satchel charges, grenades, and a knife and getting into a bunker, where you know the
Americans are going up against to have those levels.
WA: They weren’t really bunkers; they were kind of just dug out foxholes.
Every thing was really temporary, so I think they probably thought they had a pretty good
chance of penetrating, I don’t know if they thought some senior staff was there.
SM: What was the biggest difference – go ahead and discuss if you will your
transition from being in the Americal down to the 11th Light Infantry and when did that
transition occur when you went from Americal to the 11th LIB?
WA: I was in country about two months, of course the Americal division had the whole area and then each Brigade had four FACs assigned to it and their were three brigades so – then the first squadron, the 1st Cav was assigned to that unit and they had the beach area, along the low lands, along the coast. When you are assigned to the division really what you are is about four people that are assigned a division and they are their to cover any big action that comes up that they can help support, when you start flying and there is a big battle going on, they’re pretty familiar with the whole area and they can come up and help individual brigade that needs additional support. Then also when guys are on R&R and they’re gone and they’ll fill in and fly missions in that particular brigade. Then when you get with the brigades then you get more specialized and know the units a little better.

SM: When you were flying these missions, both the assistant division ALO and then as the site commander for the 11th Light, did you feel that the training that you had received here at Hurlburt, that they had done a good job in preparing for the types of missions you were conducting in Vietnam or did you look back and say, ‘Boy I wish they would have talked about this or that or the other thing?’

WA: The thing is I don’t think they knew. Like I said, we had FACs training us here but the FAC missions in country were so different depending on where you were and what you were doing that I don’t think I ever ran into anybody on the training operation that had been into a situation that I had got into where I spent that much time close to the unit.

SM: So the FACs, would you think that perhaps the training here was more suited to the facts, like you had mentioned the covey FACs who had missions, flown in Laos and Cambodia some in North Vietnam, the guys that weren’t really interacting with men on the ground but instead were doing trail walk and things of that nature?

WA: Yeah. I think when the program was started here, I don’t think they envisioned the close air support that we really did, how invigorating we were with the Army units on the ground. Even in theory you could say, ‘Here is an Army unit and here are the bad guys here and they are going to call you and ask you for some help,’ but you know what you don’t realize, you had been tracking that unit for weeks, weeks and you know where they have moved and you know where the bad guys are moving, so you
follow the whole scenario, so it’s not like called you out of the box and say, ‘Okay now here they are.’ And I don’t think it was any deficiency in the training, I just thinks nobody had that experience.

SM: It seems kind of odd to me, just from the standpoint of by ‘67 FACs had been flying close air support missions with American units and I just wonder if eventually that made its way back to training. I’ll be interested in tracking to see when it finally did make it in. The Hurlburt training in particular. That is kind of interesting.

WA: Yes, I think the Hurlburt training was maybe a little behind the time a little bit.

SM: It took a little bit more time for it to reach here.

WA: That’s like here, I went through Hurlburt, and I trained in the O-1. And I thought that was what I was going to fly in and I got in country all of sudden I’m checked out in a O-2 and they didn’t know that out here.

SM: What did you think in the differences in the two the O-1 verses the O-2 or the O-2 verses the O-1 or –

WA: Well the O-2 were a much better airplane for the mission. I had instructed that the O-1 for about the three years so I had a lot of time in it and I could fly it better that most instructors out here and I was looking forward going into combat in an airplane that I was very capable in. Then when I got into in country I got checked into a O-2 but the O-2 it had 2 engines. You couldn’t get home on the front one by itself but you get home on the back one by itself so it was a little more stable airplane.

SM: I heard a gentlemen describe a story last night or he said that there was a debate I guess among a lot of FAC pilots, which was better and apparently some FACs thought the O-2 wasn’t a good an aircraft and he described a sixty degree bank where the pilot he was flying with made this huge bank and eventually stalled in the aircraft and they were plummeting towards the earth. I was wondering if you had any hairy experiences with them yourself.

WA: It’s any airplane if you over stress it, first of all the O-2 was a good airplane except that it had about ten times as much weight in it’s suppose to because of all the radio’s it had in it and so when we flew we didn’t carry parachutes, we didn’t carry an extra person. You talking about a lot of these guys that were flying with two people, we
never – the only time we took an extra person was at night for somebody to read a map
but during the day, you never carried anybody with you, we didn’t carry parachute
because you didn’t want any extra weight, that whole back of that airplane was full of
radio equipment. In fact you are suppose to have two rocket pods on each side and we
only carried one on each side because of the weight.

SM: Would you consider that somewhat under-powered by the mission that it
was trying to perform in country.

WA: No it was overloaded by –

SM: Oh it was overloaded.

WA: It was overloaded by the Air Force –

SM: Okay that is a good distinction.

WA: Yes, it was a good airplane and the O-1 that was maneuverable, we used to
teach the Army to turn in tight and stall it on and they would go into a spin and do it over
the top or you could do down at the bottom but the airplane would do that and of course
the OV-10 was a nice looking airplane and everybody loved it but it was - some of the
guys thought it was a fighter and they weren’t really FACs, they were trying to get in on
the war themselves. That distracted I think a lot from FAC and through – you know you
were supposed to bring in fighters and support; they had the big ordnance. I’ve heard
stories so many of the OV-10 pilots, that would think, ‘Well, I can handle this myself,
you know, I can go in and I can get the bad guys,’ and instead of FACing, they were
trying to be a fighter pilot. I think that was one disadvantage of the OV-10. But it was a
much higher performance aircraft. But that was why everybody was leery and didn’t
want to do it – that is why they quite FACing the other of the other airplanes and they
used to FAC in the F100, but it was too fast and the FAC decided, ‘I’m going to do some
scraping.’

SM: The OV-10s, the ordnance that they carried with them, what did that include
usually?

WA: They could carry that a lot, they had miniguns, they had explosive rockets,
they could carry a thousand pound bomb in that center line and a couple smaller bombs
and some of them would load up you know, when they would go out and that was what
they were going to do.
SM: That would be quite a distraction for a FAC.

WA: Yeah and that was the theory of not using the 100 anymore and going to the O-2 cause when I first went over, I was suppose to fly half a tour, six months in 100 and then six months as a FAC and then they stop using the 100s as FACs and then they also decided it took you six months to learn how to be a FAC so it wasn’t very smart to do a six month tour and then swap, so. And they are right; it took you six months to be a good FAC. There were so many things that you had to keep track of. Night missions were the wildest, we didn’t like night missions because first of all, Charlie didn’t start anything at night unless the weather was bad, so you enter bad weather and back into the jungle and back into the mountains and then you are trying to locate the people on the ground, once you find the friendlies on the ground, then you find the bad guys on the ground and then in pitch dark and then you get a flare ship and he is orbiting up here and he is going to drop flares for you and then you get a gunship and he comes in and he is going to help you out and then you got four or five sets of fighters all orbiting up here and you’ve got to direct all them and find the guy on the ground and they used to be funny but you’ve got them all in different altitudes and they sometimes couldn’t trust us and they’d ask each other, what altitude do you have, what altitude do you have? And one of them would say, turn on your lights I want to see where you’re at – and you turn on your lights – you turn on your lights you get shot at. So they would keep asking us as FACs to reassure them that we had separation on all the flights. Then they would work from there and it would be a gaggle at nights sometimes, with a gun ship and a flare ship and a bunch of fighters.

SM: Would you carry flares at night in an O-2?

WA: No. You’d carry; well you would carry log flares. It looked like one those artificial logs you burn in your fireplace. Then you hung one on each wing and you’d drop that and it’d burn for about fifteen minutes on the ground and that was what we carried.

SM: What were some of the incidents that you endured as a FAC, as a pilot while you were getting shot at?

WA: I got shot at mostly every day.

SM: What were the most hairiest experiences?
WA: One of the funniest ones, there was a big fire fight on top of a ridge and I was putting in air strikes and every time I would go into mark the target I would get shot at with a fifty caliber and I finally after a couple of passes, I figured out if I got down below the top of that ridge, they couldn’t depress the fifty cal on me, so they weren’t hosing me down, so I stayed below the ridge and what I do is orbit down below the ridge and then after the fighters come in and I’d go back up, if they had to have a mark or something and then I would go back up and then I would go back down and when I got back to Chu Lai, they were refueling the airplane and the crew chief come in and he was upset and he said, ‘I don’t mind patching the bullet holes,’ he said, ‘but this is ridiculous,’ and he said, ‘Come on out here,’ so I climbed up and looked on the top of the wing and there was thirty shrapnel holes on the top of the wing, some of them were the size of your fist and he said, ‘I don’t what you’ve been doing,’ he said, ‘But this is ridiculous,’ and come to find out that when they were dropping the high drag bombs on the top of that ridge and I was orbiting down below, the shrapnel was – I thought I was taking ground fire on top, so I decided that it was the worse of two evils, either that or the fifty. That was the worst that I ever tore up an airplane. I got shot up a couple of times with an engine go out and you could limp back. In fact, you could hold altitude with a back engine but you couldn’t hold altitude to the two the front engines, so you always hoped if you were lost the back engine, you didn’t have a mountain to roll over. Went back a couple of times like that. Some of my area experience, I went down five times flying as the door gunner in those choppers and one time we got shot up pretty bad with fire and the thing was burning and spining, another kid and I jumped out about thirty feet off the ground into a rice paddy and on the way down I kept thinking I remembered I had to do the parachute roll when I hit but you can’t do a parachute roll when you land in mud and a rice paddy up to your knees, so I tore up one of my knees. But a couple of other times, one time we went down to pick up a VC in a field and he threw a hole up through the tail rotor and that sent us down. But overall, we went down five times with different problems.

SM: In the choppers?

WA: In the chopper. A couple of times we spent the whole day and night on the ground before another would come and get us.
SM: Now what choppers were you flying?

WA: These were Hueys, straight old Hueys.

SM: How did you find yourself being tasked in door gunner in Huey?

WA: I enjoyed it. I had a couple FACs that didn’t want to do it. The crew chief was the door gunner on the left side and I was on the right side and the brigade commander usually sat down in the middle with his intelligence officer and that was it and they would go out and check every thing. But – I got pretty good with the M-60, when we trained at Ft. Lewis, Washington, we had a bet with the Army guys, this other Air Force guy and I – they challenged us and we got to pick the weapons so the first sergeant that taught us how to fire the M-60 from the hip and he didn’t tell these Army officers, so we showed up at the firing range to have this shoot out and they thought we were going to use pistols, their .45 against our .38s and we pulled out the M-60 machine gun from the hip, Rambo, John Wayne style and we had gotten pretty good at it, the first sergeant had trained us for a couple of days and so we won quite a few beers, so I was pretty good with that, with the M-60 and then I flew about three or four missions with the Blue Ghosts who were the choppers that were assigned - gun ships that were assigned cover the first squadron of the 1st Cav, so I flew as a right door gunner with them for a couple of days and that was interesting. I spent a couple of days out in the field with the 1st squadron of the 1st Cav in armored personnel carriers and that was interesting. I spent a couple of days going up the river with the Navy on their swift boats and that always interesting, those guys used to always beg us for targets and like I told you we were the only ones that could be giving targets so they have their swift boats up the river and they’d want a target so you’d look around try to find something, normally you couldn’t find anything worth while, but once in a while you would. But they would fire their mortars from the swift boats but then that was funny because they would be about fifty meters long and then fifty meters short and then he’d say, ‘Okay, now try and fire on the same rock of the boat,’ and they are firing that mortar.

SM: Not a very stable platform?

WA: No but they had like to have a target to shoot at. Then I got to go out to the New Jersey, we were the first ones to put in the New Jersey, so we flew out in the chopper and briefed the skipper of the New Jersey and how were going to work and put
in quite a bit of their artillery. They were very interested in put in because they’d fire and
two or three minutes later a shell would be coming in and they were so close that they
were having to fire almost straight up and hit the targets on that was very nerve wracking
till you fire and you are trying to observe and you are trying to stay out of the line of fire
and watch to see where they are hitting and so we didn’t like to do that.

SM: How frequently would you bring in naval gunfire?

WA: I probably only did it about five or six times the whole time that I was there.
I don’t whether the New Jersey moved some place up the coast and it was just about two
weeks or something that we worked and I got some pictures of my trip out to New Jersey,
we didn’t work with them a whole lot.

SM: Would you also bring in artillery fire?

WA: Yes and that was the same way and I didn’t like to put in artillery and I kind
of let the Army do their own artillery cause I didn’t like the artillery. One of the
problems was the triple canopy jungle; it was very difficult to see where it is hitting
sometimes. You had to know where the fire bases were and where it was coming from,
then you had to know the millimeter of the guns that they were shooting and what the
tracking time. They’d normally give you a track time, it’s a thirty seconds minute or
whatever it was and then they give you a firing time and you could hack and then you
could stay out of the road. I did not train personally – it was not accurate. So I didn’t
put in any more artillery and once in a while I had to but I didn’t like to. I wouldn’t put
in close to the good guys because I didn’t trust the accuracy of them.

SM: Either the Naval gunfire support or the artillery support you brought in, were
their any friendly casualties as a result of that or any short rounds or things like that?

WA: No. That’s because we didn’t put them in close. You’d put them into
suspected buildup areas, suspected VC camps or storage area and things like that.

SM: Now these aspects of being a FAC in terms of determining what you want to
be careful of and what’s the closes you want to bring a certain ordnance and a certain
aircraft, was that something that you learned OJT or was it briefed to you by other FACs
or how did you discover, the F4s are great at seven hundred fifty pound bombs and if you
want to bring in Napalm it was the 100s, you got to be careful of Naval gunfire, how did
you pick these things up as you went along?
WA: Maybe somebody mentioned it along the line but I don’t recall and it was kind of OJT, you kind of learned as went along. First time you put in artillery and pin pointed the coordinates for it and you saw they weren’t hitting exactly where those coordinates were and then you said, I’m going to watch this and next time I’m going to put then and see the effects on it and this is a rarity or this a norm and you – like I said it took you about six months to learn to a FAC.

SM: To be a good FAC?

WA: Yes. Now you could go up there and stay hid and in most cases, sometimes you had to go in but you know you could coast some of the FAC’s could and not look for trouble and stay out of trouble but if you got in a nitty gritty you had to know what you were doing.

SM: I assume by your statement that there were some who did?

WA: Yes, some do. You know I’m sure some of the Nails and the Coveys would get up and some of the guys would just bore holes in sky.

SM: But it wasn’t common?

WA: No. I would say no, uncommon. But like I told you one percent of the troops on the ground they would fire their gun and that was what they say.

SM: Did you ever get shot down on a O-2?

WA: No. I’ve limped back with an engine shot out and shot up. Had a bullet bounce off the bottom of my seat, that’s probably the closest, but that was the only armored plate was on the seat.

SM: Thank goodness for that.

WA: But it bounced off the ball and rolled around and I still have it at home.

SM: Do you? What kind of round was it do you know?

WA: It looked like a thirty caliber. It was all shredded off and all it is the inside core.

SM: What was the heaviest thing – you mentioned earlier fifty cal?

WA: Thirty-seven millimeter? RPG’s sometimes, the rockets, hand held rockets and we’d fire those at you. You could avoid those, thirty-seven millimeters was probably the worst that we had. And that is not really bad and that was – they didn’t have the big stuff that they had further north. That’s why we had trouble getting some of the guys that
were used to going north, some of the fighter pilots to come down to our low altitude. We had a lot of small arms fire and we could get you down. We had a funny incident flying into Duc Pho with a chopper every night; we’d get shot at every night coming in. They guy was in hooch down there and finally about the second or third time I said to the brigade commander, ‘Go get that guy.’ And he said ‘No, that guy can’t hit anything anyway. If we go in and kill him with a bomb, they will put somebody there who can hit us.’ So we never went up and left him alone and they would shoot at us every time.

SM: And he never hit you?

WA: No.

SM: One last question real quick. Part of the interview process involves the release of our copyright control over this to the Texas Tech University Vietnam Archive for the purposes of distributing the oral history and transcripts to anybody who would be interested. This in no way restricts your story or your ability to write your story or distribute it for the purposes of books magazines, movies. It is not a restrictive agreement; it is just giving us permission to release the interview to patrons who come to the archive. Would you be willing to agree to that type of system?

WA: I agree to that.

SM: I agree to it as well. Thank you. This ends the first interview with Colonel William Anderson.