Jonathon Bernstein: This is Jonathon Bernstein conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Terry Maroste. We’re in the Special Collections Library at Texas Tech, and it’s approximately quarter after one in the afternoon. All right, Mr. Maroste, I guess you start off by giving us brief historical sketch of yourself, starting birth pretty much up through the time you joined the military.

Terry Maroste: Well, my name is Terry Maroste. I was born in Greenville, South Carolina. My dad was in the service at that time, this was 1943, and he had come back from being in World War II, and I happened to be at that particular base or something there, where my mother and father were there when I was born. However, he had to go back over to India or something, India, Burma?

JB: China, Burma, India?

TM: Yes, China, Burma, India, theatre, and so my mother moved after I was born in South Carolina, moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I grew up my early years, and until my father came back from the war. He wound up being a career officer, and we were stationed in Florida, at Eglin Air Force Base. We were stationed in Colorado; I can’t remember the name of the base. We were stationed in New Mexico, at Holloman Air Force Base, and my father got in an accident off duty in Alamogordo, New Mexico. He got hit by a car; and it was very serious accident. He was comatose for many years. He wound up getting a medical discharge from the Air Force about the time I was around sixteen when my mother, and they moved him into a convalescent home in California,
around 1958 or so. And I had been going to different high schools, in the mean time, but
in California I finished high school, while my father was in this nursing home and then he
wound up dying from pneumonia, and I graduated high school there, started going to
junior college. I graduated in ’61 and started junior college for two years, and dropped
out for a little while, and got a draft notice from the Army, and so I joined the Air Force
because my dad was in the Air Force and I didn't want to be in the Army. I thought
eventually I’d be a pilot, but that never materialized. I passed all the tests and everything
but they didn’t have the training I was supposed to go to, and Aviation cadets was
discontinued, and I wasn’t able to go to that. So I just stayed in and went to jump school,
and lots of different special air warfare training schools, and got assigned finally to the 1st
Air Commando Wing in Hurlbert Field, Florida. And after that I went to Southeast Asia
and worked on setting up a weather net, we called it “up country”, but I guess I can talk
about it now, it was Laos. Used to, I was stationed at Udorn, Thailand, and used to fly
from Udorn to Vientiane, Laos, and then get on a smaller; whatever was available,
aircraft to go up country to train indigenous personnel on how to take weather
observations at different hilltop sites all over Laos. We had a simple code that they
would transmit with their regular radio reports. They’d add on a weather report, the end
of that and send it down to the CIA compound in Long Tieng, Laos, and from there down
into either Udorn or even Saigon, wherever they wanted weather information in Laos.
And usually you would stay up there, close to the full month, traveling back and forth all
over the country. I’d only come down country into Thailand and Udorn once a month to
get paid, stay around three or four days, had R & R and then go back up. We wore
civilian clothes and we weren’t even supposed to be there.

JB: Stepping back to going into the military, well even before that, had you
discussed the military at all with your father, and his experiences etc.?
TM: Yes, he had told me exciting stories about his World War II experiences.
They were flying B-29s out of China and Burma theatre, and he was involved in that, and
I thought that was pretty interesting. So I always wanted to be in the Air Force if I had
the chance. So the Army gave me the chance when Vietnam came along.

JB: So, going in, what was basic like?
TM: Oh, I was in pretty good shape when I went in because I played football in high school, and I thought the physical part of training and everything was a piece of cake. Didn’t have to get really used to the discipline because my father was a disciplinarian. Being a service brat, I can remember him telling us to go out there and police the yard, things like that. So I was, I came through it real easy. It wasn’t hard at all. It was a long time ago, we’re talking 1964, but I thought it was a piece of cake and maybe that’s why I wanted something more than that when I signed up for jump school and everything. That was a different story.

JB: Now, when you did enlist, they told you basically they would pay for your next two years of college?

TM: Yes, that’s what they told me for that Airmen Education Commissioning program. They weren’t going to guarantee that though, they told me. They said that depending on the needs of the Air Force, and I passed all the tests with flying colors. My scores were real good, and that’s one of the reasons why I wound up being in the weather service, is because they take like the top five percent of the people on these certain tests, scores, to put them in the weather service, kind of, you need to have it right on the ball to, this technical training to get through that. And so they told me they’d contact me when I could go to AECP, well in the meantime I kept delaying that by going to all these different survival schools and jump schools and everything. They got a lot of volunteers, and I was gung ho.

JB: Now, was jump school considered your tech school at that point?

TM: Well, no my tech school was the weather observer course. I went at Chanute Air Force base, Illinois, weather observer school.

JB: And how long was that?

TM: It was a pretty long school. I think it lasted; well it’s on my record here, how many weeks it was I think. Okay, weather observer student; it was about two months I think, eight weeks I believe, something like that. That’s what I get from this right here.

Here’s student, oh wait, here’s Chanute, 15 December, July, how’s that?

JB: Looks like we’ve got 17 December.
TM: No, that’s probably when I was at Luke, Chanute here June ’66 to December ’66. Two different squadrons, June to December; so that was a lot longer than I thought, July, August, September, three months, or December.

JB: To December, yes, six months.

AG: Six months.

JB: What was the training like there, what did it involve, was it classroom, fieldwork?

TM: Mostly classroom, how to take weather observations, how to determine from studying the sky what type of clouds those are. We had to learn about the clouds, how to estimate how high they were. How to run graphs of pressures for balloons for atmospheric pressure and all kinds of technical stuff.

JB: So were you working with weather balloons and stuff?

TM: Well, after I graduated from weather observer school, they sent me to Luke Air Force Base, Phoenix, Arizona to be a regular weatherman, and at that time they were training German pilots. It was part of the regular, United States pilots. They were training German pilots in how to fly the F-104s, and there were lots of accidents. F-104 is a hard airplane to fly, and I used to have to take weather observations every time one of those went down. What were the weather conditions when this plane crashed? So I was pretty busy taking weather observations even though the weather was always clear. Every once in a while you have a summer thunderstorm and then it was bad, but most of the time it was clear, and after doing that for a while we, they wanted somebody to go down to the gunnery range in Gila Bend, Arizona, which is probably 60, 70, 80 miles south and west of Phoenix. Out in the middle of the desert where their gunnery range was, to send up weather balloons, get upper air winds for the gunnery runs, and so I volunteered to do that. So I went down to Gila Bend, I was the only guy at this little shack we had out in the middle of the desert and lived there. I just lived there, it was my barracks, my workstation everything. I’d send up balloons all day for the gunnery range, and if I ever wanted to go get something to eat or something, I had to get in the Air Force truck and drive the three, four miles down to the base to get something to eat and shower or whatever, but my cot was in the weather shack on the gunnery range, so I volunteered to do that. So I did that for a while.
JB: So, you went to jump school before that?

TM: No. That’s when they asked me, could I volunteer for that, Jon. I’m a volunteer! He’s a good volunteer; ask him. They asked me if I wanted to go to jump school. Sure man, I’ll go! So I went to jump school.

JB: Were there any other Air Force personnel going with you?

TM: I think there was maybe one or two in the whole class, me and another guy, or maybe three, but no more than three, and they also used to call me Air Force. “Hey, Air Force!” I remember that.

JB: How was the training there?

TM: It was pretty rough, but being in good shape and being gung ho, I liked it. The only thing is, it was like in July, Fort Benning, Georgia is hot, and man, I couldn’t wait for the time when they’d say all right hit the showers. They had these showers, these racks of like fire sprinklers. On these racks for twenty-five, thirty feet long, and we’d run through there while it was on, with our clothes on, just to cool off, and I couldn’t wait for that man. We did a lot of running. But the 34 foot tower was probably the, not roughest, but you have to make lots and lots of practice jumps out of this 34 foot tower, and you’d slide down a rope to hit the ground. Different types of PLF, going in forwards, going in backwards, sideways, sideways, that got to be pretty bruising. Actually, when you finally made your first jump, it was easier than the tower. I couldn’t believe it, this is a piece of cake, jumping. I was ready. They also have a 250-foot tower that you drop out of first before you go actually jump out of airplane. They pull you all the way up, 250 feet. The canopy is already open, its hanging up there, so when they let loose, just kind of pops open and you just come down free fall, not free fall, but float down under the canopy and that got me. “I can’t wait to get in the airplane.” I got in the airplane it was a piece of cake. I was out the door, man, this is nice. Jumped out of, I guess it was a C-130 I guess, about that kind of thing. But I’ve jumped out of; I’ll tell you later, all kinds of different airplanes, all kinds. My first jump was out of a C-130 I think. Maybe I did five jumps; then you got your wings. I was kind of proud of myself, getting the wings, nice.

JB: Now I guess, stepping back to Basic for a second, was there any weapons training or anything like that?
TM: Yes, we’re taught with the M-16.

JB: You were taught with the –16?

TM: Yes, had the M-16 then, and a .38 pistol. I wound up getting expert with both. They gave me a little ribbon for being expert. Of course, I also fired different, we didn’t have to qualify with them, but they gave us the experience of firing different weapons like the M-60 machine gun and things like that. We fired some different weapons.

JB: .50 caliber?

TM: No, I never fired one of those.

JB: So after jump school then you headed to survival school?

TM: Yes, I can’t remember what order it was, but I believe that the first one was at Stead Air Force base combat survival school in Nevada. I think that was the first one.

JB: And that was basically just SERE training?

TM: Yes.

JB: How was it?

TM: Well, I got pretty hungry. There was nothing to eat out there. In Nevada, kind of started out, they dropped us off in the mountains. We had to make our way down the slopes to the valley, but not much to eat. They’d given us nothing to eat, so it was interesting. I liked that kind of stuff; I thought it was nice.

JB: Did you have any interaction with civilian populations at that point, or was it pretty much desolate?

TM: No, we were all out there on our own.

JB: I’ve heard a lot of accounts of other SERE schools where local civilian populations in on it as well, they try to capture you.

TM: No, this was all military.

JB: How long was the school?

TM: At Stead, let’s see. Doesn’t say on the certificate, it’s probably in my record here. I can remember being out there a few days, so I know it was more than a week.

Survival training completed ’65. No, it doesn’t say how long it was, but I believe it was something like eight to ten days total.

JB: And were you captured?
TM: Of course, everybody got captured.

JB: Oh, is that right?

TM: Oh man. I was, I had my head on my shoulders pretty straight, and they told us in the classroom part before they actually let us out there to get captured, on what to do, and so, of course right being captured, they lock you up and everything. One of the things they do is; if you won’t tell they keep asking you, you’re supposed to give just your name, rank, serial number. If you won’t tell them any information they want, they’re going to punish you. Well, one of the things they do is they put you in a barrel filled with water with only about enough room, and they put a lid on it after they stick you in that, with about enough rooms for you to get your mouth above the water to breathe, and they stick you in there for hours and that’s one of the punishments to try to make you talk. I went through that okay, but I said well, “I can do this.” I know these guys are not the enemy. These are guys that are Air Force just like me, just trying to play a game. So one of the things I did, about the third time they put me in the barrel like that, and they also had different boxes they put you in, lock you up in a little box, solitary. I can’t remember which one I was in at that time, but I got a plan. I’m tired of this. I’m tired of going in a box or in a hole or whatever. I said, “Okay, I’ll talk. I’ll talk.” And so they let me out. I’m out of there now; I’m out of the box. Take me over to interrogation room and they say, “Okay, you’re going to talk. Now tell us what’s this and what’s that?” I go, “Ah jeez. Oh man, I’m sorry, my name is Terry Maroste, Airmen First Class, whatever I was, AF19803436, whatever my serial number was. Played that game with them again, wasn’t going to talk. And so they went out of the room. Just you wait right here. They’re mad at me, they went out of the room. I haven’t ate in days, while they went out of the room, they had left some sandwich, and a cup of coffee in there. So they were gone. I just went over and got the sandwich, got the coffee, drank it. They come back in; I guess they noticed that it was gone. They said, “Well now, tell us your story.” I says, “Oh, I changed my mind. I’m not going to tell you nothing.” So they took me back out there, but at least I got a break from being in the hole. I got something to eat, got something to drink. I remember that.

JB: Now were any of the instructors that you were dealing with, even through basic and everything, were they Vietnam Veterans?
TM: I think maybe at Stead, some of them. Well this was like, '65, '66, they probably were. They would have had to been over there real early, but there were guys over there a long time before I got there, but I think so. I can’t really remember for sure but probably.

JB: Were there any invocations of “This will keep you alive in Vietnam, pay attention to this?”

TM: Yes. Do this; do that. This is what you’re supposed to do.

JB: Did you have any idea that you were headed to Southeast Asia?

TM: No. I just thought I was going to all these schools just because they asked me if I wanted to volunteer, I thought it would be, nice, cool, gung ho.

JB: Were you aware of what was going in Southeast Asia?

TM: I wasn’t really aware. I had learned a little bit about that while I was going to college. There wasn’t really much news going out about it yet. This was ’61, ’62, and it probably didn’t start getting hot until they started drafting us guys to go, and I didn’t even know I was going to go over there until after I finished all these schools and got assigned to the Air Commando Wing and that’s when I found out where I was headed.

JB: So after SERE school, you were sent to Hurlbert from there?

TM: Yes. Went to Hurlburt and I went to the other survival schools, I guess out at Hurlbert.

JB: What was the atmosphere like at Hurlbert?

TM: All Air Commandos, gung ho, bush hats, Laos boots, scarves around their necks, kind of thought of nets and I was one so I thought that was cool. PT all the time, even this was the Air Force, a lot like the Army.

JB: Were they gearing up to go?

TM: Yes, there was lots of training going on there at Hurlbert for different types of aircraft they were going to be using over there.

JB: B-26s?

TM: A-26s.

JB: LA-26s at that point.

TM: A1E skyraiders and those sort of.

JB: So when did you get your orders that you were heading overseas?
TM: I believe it was, I don’t know about the orders, but I was over there from I think June of ’66 when I got there. I was not really prepared for all these questions, I don’t have answers on the top of my head, because it was a long time ago, but I do have my records here. So I was assigned to Hurlburt in December ’65, and I wound up getting to Southeast Asia in July of ’66.

JB: Now, how was the trip over?

TM: Well, we went on civilian airplane. I thought that was kind of neat, instead of having to ride over there in an Air Force plane. Landed, I guess it must have been Saigon, didn’t even stay there very long. Got off one airplane, got on another and wound up at Udorn Thailand all in the same day.

JB: You had orders straight to Udorn?

TM: Yes. Just got off the plane in Saigon and another plane came, I don’t remember what kind it was, maybe that was from the civilian airplane I might have got on a military airplane, C-130 probably, to go to Thailand.

JB: Arriving in Udorn, what was your first impression?

TM: You could see the planes coming down, back from their missions, F-4s and things like that, F-105s coming in, landing there. We had to hold in the pattern while some of them came in, I remember. We couldn’t even land, there was an emergency ones coming in, and I remember that, and got on the ground and looked around and it was all like, I remember like muddy, not muddy. It was the dry season then I think, but red clay, reminded me sort of, Fort Benning, red claylike everything, and these tin roofed hooches all over, everything was made out of wood and tin.

JB: Now, was the 10th weather squadron established already, were you coming in sort of?

TM: Well, from my research, the 10th weather squadron was established in World War II I believe. It was kind of deactivated I believe after World War II. It was reactivated for Vietnam, so they were there during the beginning of the Vietnam conflict, but I was assigned to the 1st Air Commando Wing attached, I don’t know if I was assigned to the 10th Weather Squadron and attached to the 1st Air Commando or vice versa, but I didn’t do any of the things that the guys that were at Udorn in the 10th Weather Squadron did. My mission was upcountry in the weather net in Laos. So I
guess, I was assigned according to orders. I was assigned to 10th Weather Squadron and
probably attached or loaned out to 1st Air Commando Wing.

JB: Now was the first Air Commando Wing operating out of Udorn as well?
TM: Yes, I think it was like the 606 Air Commando Squadron, something like
that, I can’t remember exactly, but.

JB: Had you been briefed on what you would be doing before you headed over?
TM: Yes, they told me what was going on, that we needed, why they needed me
there, and what we were going to do there, and how we were going to do it, and we just
got turned loose. “We want you to go up there, make contact with these people.” I can
remember my first day, I had to go to Vientiane, Laos and they said, “Don’t, nothing
military, civilian clothes, no military ID card, no nothing.”

JB: Were you actually separated from the Air Force at that point?
TM: Well, according to the Air Force, when I was up there I didn’t even exist.
And checked in with the American embassy, or the Air attaché, they’re all kind of in the
same building, American embassy. They issued me an American embassy card. They
told me what my cover story was, in case I ever got captured, kind of like Mission
Impossible. Secretary would disavow any knowledge of your being here, whatever, but
we will try to come get you if you run into problems, let us know. I accepted that, I say
well, okay, if that’s the way it is, that’s the way it is, and headed up country.

JB: Who were you making contact with up country?
TM: Well, we knew them only by their first names, come to find out later they
were all CIA. We called them Cas, or “the company.” They worked for “the company”
or they worked for Cas. Those they told us, those are your bosses, you do what those
guys say. If you need to go anywhere, you ask those guys and tell them what you need to
do, and you’re cleared as far as we’re concerned. My Op told me what I was supposed to
do, had made all the arrangements ahead of time. For instance, to do what I was
supposed to do, it required an officer. So when I got to the American embassy in
Vientiane, Laos, they knew I was military because they’re covering it up. They thought
that I was an officer; I was a 1st Lieutenant. In reality I was only an Airmen 2nd Class, but
the military thought I was 1st Lieutenant because that’s what the rank that I had to have to
do what I was supposed to do, so they bought that.
JB: Did that cause any problems?
TM: No.
JB: Now, getting up country, well first of all, were you based out of one particular area or were you moving all over?
TM: Well, yes I was based at what the call Long Tieng, Laos, where I worked out of. Went out from there, site 20 alternate. That’s where I had a hooch, lived there, stayed there, and any time I needed to go somewhere I’d tell John. I need to go John, up to site 36. I’ve got to train a guy up there and he’d make arrangements and we’d go, or he’d say that’s too hot up there, today, maybe tomorrow, how about going? So I’d pick out different places, I need to go there. So eventually I wound up going somewhere where I wanted to go. Whichever mode of transportation was available I could take, whether it was Air America, mostly all Air America. There was Continental, sort of like Cas, but they weren’t Air America.
JB: Similar transport?
TM: Something like that, I don’t, I think it was, well I don’t remember if it was CIA, but Derek was either Air America or these other guys, and they were all going everywhere, rice drops and things like that. They had Hueys and they had H-34s and they had Turboporters and helio-couriers and C-47s and C-46s and all different kinds of, mostly STOLs, short takeoff and landing aircraft.
JB: Few Caribous?
TM: Caribous, yes, caribous, C-123s and they all say Air America, they all had all that, and so whatever was going, I went on. Some of the sites you couldn’t get a C-123 in, and you’d have to take a Huey, courier or a helicopter, but the larger size, you could go in a 123, those pilots were good. And them 123s, they could land that thing like three hundred feet; I couldn’t believe it. Well, probably a little longer than that, but it seemed like it, and they were good pilots. A lot of the strips were going uphill or downhill or had jogs in them, and they were short, and all dirt, and mountains on all sides in front of you and all around you, and one way in, one way out. If the wind was going to your tail when you’re going out, that’s they way it is, because that’s the only way out. It was interesting.
JB: Now, I guess training the indigenous people you were working with, did you
work with an interpreter as well?
TM: Yes. I had a bodyguard and interpreter. He was a member of what they
called the Thai Paru, so he spoke Thai and Lao and the Meo language, which is Mongons
I guess they are. We call them Meos, those little people, we called them little people,
tribe people. And he spoke all those languages, and his assignment was my bodyguard;
that he was my sidekick, and wherever I went, he went with me to protect me, advise me,
help me interpret, whatever; kind of like Batman and Robin.
JB: What was his name?
TM: I had two different ones. One of them got killed, so I was assigned, when he
was out on another mission. Tow Wa Chi, I remember one’s name was Tow Wa Chi, and
the other one, I really can’t remember his name. Sorry, but it’s been too long, but they
were good guys. I really think about the one of them, the one that got killed, I really
missed him. They would have laid their lives down for you, to protect you.
JB: Wow. Do you want to pause for a second?
TM: Yes, let’s take a break.
JB: Okay, getting back to dealing with the indigenous people, what exactly were
you training them to do?
TM: Well, what I would do is when I got to a new site, where we needed to have
some weather data; they had these home defense forces around all these sites. They were
indigenous people, we called them little people, the Meo tribesmen that were in the Lao
Army, I guess. And I’d usually pick out the radio operator, because he was smart enough
to be a radio operator. A lot of these guys didn’t have much education, but at least he
was a radio operator. He knew how to operate a radio, and I, through my interpreter of
course, tell him why I was there. And all he knew was I was an American, and we
needed his help, and he thought that was cool; we’d picked him out. All right, so you’re
responsible for this, we’d tell him. This is your job. You’re working with us, and I’d
train him how to estimate what the cloud cover was, how high the clouds were. I gave
him a little field weather kit which had a thermometer and a psychrometer where you
could, dew point, train him how to use that, a little wind indicator, wind speed
instrument, and a compass to tell him what direction the wind was coming from, and I
issued him a watch, because, what time it is you’re taking it. They don’t even have watches. What time I gave him a watch, he thought that was neat. We need to have these every hour, wherever we wanted, every two hours or whatever, and just basically train him how to estimate what the weather conditions were, to make a long story short. And gave him a little code when he sent his radio messages, how to code it into the radio transmissions. They used, at most of the sites, hand crank generators where they’d get their power, with a hand crank generator and CW, Morse code, transmitted down to our base and Long Tieng, site 20 alternate, and the CIA guys would get that and disseminate it to whoever needed it from the area, down to Udorn or Saigon or wherever. At the base in Long Tieng I had a single sideband radio, where, if I needed to tell my people anything, I’d get on the radio and call and tell them what was going on, but most of the dissemination of the information was done by the CIA at Long Tieng, down to Udorn where my commander at Udorn would also disseminate it to where they needed to go. But a lot of this information was for, like Air America, they wanted weather for their rice drops and things that they were places. So it was kind of gathered at site 20 alternate, at least for me. They also had other people that were going farther south in Laos, in the southern section of Laos, where they had a base down there. I can’t remember what town they were in, but they’d do the same thing. Eventually the information would wind up all over Southeast Asia, but we were giving them the information from various Lima sites in Laos.

JB: How large an area were you covering?

TM: Well, my responsibility personally, was northern Laos; from just north of Vientiane all the way up to the North Vietnamese border. Just a couple clicks from North Vietnam.

JB: That’s a large area for one person.

TM: Yes. There was only three of us at one time over there on our team. I was the North, Hank Kelly was the South, and Capt. Charles Smith; he was the commander. He usually stayed in Udorn or other places, but he wouldn’t usually of out to the field like we did. He was doing the weather briefings and everything at the base in Udorn. We were just trainers and gophers.

JB: So I guess you were then flying with Air America quite frequently.
TM: All the time. I had a logbook of all, I’d log all my missions where I went, how long it was, and I think I probably had two hundred and some missions while I was there.

JB: Any memorable ones, off the top of your head?

TM: We used to fly over the PDJ, we called it, a lot, Plain of Jars, and sometimes you’d get shot at going over there; if you were in a big airplane no problem. I can remember one experience, had to go to a site in northern Laos close to the North Vietnamese border in a Turboporter, single engine Turboprop, STOL aircraft, and when we got there, they were coming under attack and there was people running everywhere. We were in an airplane, we were there, we just, the kicker guys in the back would kick out the rice bags and ammunition and everything, and I wouldn’t even get out of the airplane because they were under attack when we got there, I guess because the airplane came in, and they were trying to get us. And so he never even shut the engine down. People were running towards the airplane. The prop is spinning so fast on a Turboprop they can’t even see the prop. I remember one lady, one of those Meo women, run up to the airplane and hit the propeller and psst, scattered her everywhere. I don’t know, probably didn’t damage the airplane, because we took off out of there right away, and I remember that. Oh man, that was bad. Blood all over the windshield, side door where I was, and I guess it didn’t hurt the airplane because it still ran. We got out of there. I remember; you want me telling you some of my other stories?

JB: Sure.

TM: I guess I made it back to that site when it was supposed to have cooled down a couple of day later, and started training my guy, and had to stay there a couple days. About the second night, I was staying in the, they got these huts up on stilts, made out of straw and stuff, and they got pigs and goats and chickens and farm animals right in there with you. That’s where they stay too, and got woke up in the middle of night by my interpreter. “We’ve got to go, we’ve got to go! Enemy come, enemy come!” So I had to get up in the middle of the night, take off through the jungle and hide out in the jungle. I don’t know how many, a couple, three, four clicks to a hiding place, cave or something, and hid out because they were under attack. I guess they knew I was back, and they wanted to get an American. Well they knew I’d come back, I guess, and I had to hide out
in the jungle for all night that night. Finally, about the middle of the day the next day, of course they got radio, they can know what’s going on, said, “Okay to come back. It’s clear now.” So I went back and pretty soon Air America came in and got me out of there. I guess I’d finished training that guy by that time, but I remember that in the middle of the night, had to get out of there. Want me to tell you some more stories?

JB: Sure, that’s great. That’s pretty much what we’re doing this for.

TM: I can remember, oh about halfway through my tour up there, that all of a sudden the Jolly Greens show up. I had never seen them at all, for a whole half of my tour, and all of a sudden these two or three CH-3 Jolly Green choppers land there at Long Tieng. Air Force guys get out with Air Force uniforms on, and I’m going well, that’s interesting. We’re supposed to be civilians and there’s Air Force airplanes right there, and so they had started to use Long Tieng at that particular time I guess, the day I was there, for a forward base before they were dispatched out to pick up pilots and stuff.

Well, I can remember a Colonel walks up to me. I was in civilian clothes and he just happened to ask me who I was, and I told him my name, and what are you doing here? I go, well, I work, I gave him my cover story, and to make a long story short that was the end of it. But later on, one of the guys on the crew of his airplane confronted me and says, we know that you’re supposed to be here, but we don’t know what you’re doing, but would you like to come with us. If you want to, we got to go on a mission, and if you want to, if you’re not doing nothing, come along with us. I says okay. So I jumped in the Jolly Green chopper and flew it off up into North Vietnam and we picked a pilot up out of the jungle out of North Vietnam, and I can remember we came under ground fire as we were lifting the pilot up out of the jungle on a hoist, and he got a round through the leg on his way up the hoist while the bullets were flying through the fuselage, and I was firing my AK-47 out the door and we got out of there, but we saved his life and I can remember the medics, or the PJ, when he got hit in the leg, they just put a bandage on it and put a plastic bag like over his leg, and I can remember sitting there watching that plastic bag fill up with blood. But the look on that guy’s face, knowing that we saved him, and he’s going around hugging us, thanking us, I’ll never forget it.

JB: That would be a very rewarding feeling.
TM: Yes. We got one out. If it wasn’t for those guys, they saved him. I was just along for the ride, and additional support. I can remember another time; I don’t know if y’all have ever heard of the Ravens, I didn’t even know about these Ravens. They didn’t come along until after I was gone, but at that time I was there, any forward control missions were done by Air America, not the Air Force. I guess later they might have come up there, one of the Air America pilots says, I’ve got to do a mission and I need a backseater, are you available? I said, “Yes, sir.” I called him sir not because he’s military. He’s Air America as far as I know. I’d like to go with you. He says, “Okay. We’re going. We’ve got a mission to do.” And we went out of Long Tieng a few klicks and he says, “Okay now, that canister over there, that’s smoke bomb. There’s a hatch between your legs down in the bottom of the airplane. Slide that thing to the back.” And I went, “Okay.” “So now when I tell you, grab that canister and pull that pin, and when I tell you, throw the thing through the bottom of the airplane.” I went, “Okay.” So he said, “All right. Go!” And I threw the canister out the bottom of the airplane, we marked smoke targets, and here comes the F-4s and F-100s and all that, coming in bombing our smoke mark, I can remember that. I just volunteered to go along with them and help them out. And we came under fire at that time, and I can remember bullets coming through that little airplane, but none of us got hit. We got bullets in the airplane, but we kept on trucking, come back, successful mission.

JB: You ever engaged in any kind of operations on the ground?

TM: No. That’s one of the reasons I wanted to be in the Air Force instead of the Army. Being with the Air Commandos was close enough, but most of the action I saw was when I was airborne. We did at one time, came under attack by, they had a coup, a military coup that AT-28s that Laotians were using, they had an insurrection or something, and they were bombing site 20 alternate, Long Tieng. They come in there and started bombing our own airplanes. We were bombing our site. Bombs go off all around us.

JB: Airplanes that were based there?

TM: Yes. Well they thought they might have come out of Vientiane. They weren’t based there, but they probably came from Vientiane, and they were trying to overthrow something, and I can remember our own airplanes, T-28s. And the guy’s name
was General Ma. That was the commander of Air force army, I knew him personally, and he had told me that those were just a couple of his pilots, went over to the other side or something, and thought that that was the thing to do. That they were going to try to help the enemy instead of doing their job. They turned over and we wound up shooting them down. They just turned on us, our own side too. It was about two of them started bombing us, and they shot them down, out of Long Tieng. I remember that, bombs going all around us but nothing real close to where I was at that time, but they got a few buildings I think before they got them.

JB: Did you have any dealings with Vang Pao?

TM: Oh, yes I knew General Vang Pao. He was the one that gave me my AK-47, and he also gave me in appreciation for me being there and me helping the cause, gave me an AK-47, he also gave me a Meo bird rifle, has a loading flintlock, and Meo bird rifle, gave me one of those. I knew General Vang Pao. He lived there at Long Tieng.

JB: The rescue mission you went on; was that the only one you went on, did you do that very often?

TM: One mission I went on, it wasn’t really a rescue mission. They were going to go back down country, out of there, and so I just rode with the Jolly Greens to go back to Udorn, and on top of it, PJs, on that trip I can remember them telling me that they had, just a little earlier, had some prisoners that they were starting to interrogate them right on the airplane. I guess it might have been some of the Cas guys with them or something. And he told me that they wouldn’t talk and they’d just kick them out while we were airborne.

JB: They got the others to talk then?

TM: Yes, that got the other ones to talk, right as we started to interrogate them, right on the airplane. That wasn’t on the plane that I was on, but that particular PJ told me on another one of his missions that they did. Taught the other ones a lesson, you talk or this is going to happen to you.

JB: Did you of any other instance of that happening?

TM: No, I remember one time we went up to site 36, and they had another POW down in the pit. They had these, their jails, I guess, if you like, were pits in the ground with bamboo covers all over them. They had a POW. I saw him down in the hole, and I
guess I don’t know how long he’d been down there with nothing to eat, no water, no
nothing. They were just ripening him up to be interrogated, but I remember that, seeing
that, but I don’t know what ever happened to him. He wasn’t ready to talk, so they were
just letting him stew for a while.

JB: Now, I guess the entire time you were there, were you in civilian clothes or
were you wearing military uniform at all?

TM: No, the whole time upcountry was civilian clothes. The only time I put my
uniform on was when we were down into Thailand, when I got back to Udorn.

JB: Where’d you go for R & R?

TM: Well, one time I went down to Chang Mai, Thailand. Another time, I went
to Hua Hin. That was the King’s summer home. The reason I got to Hua Hin, where the
king was, was because at that time I started getting bold with some guys from the Paru
that were free fall, and I wanted to learn how to free-fall. So they were training me how
to free-fall. Well, they were going down the Hua Hin to do a demonstration for the King
of Thailand at his summer home, and so I went down there. I was trained enough by that
time and went down there and jumped in with the Paru, and got to spend a few days there
while we were, because I was the only American, I was the guest of honor, and I can
remember, being the guest of honor. They got this big banquet table, the guest of honor
is supposed to have the choice meat or whatever. I had to put my hand into this pig,
reach in there and grab a hunk of his brains through his mouth, grab a hunk of his brains,
pull it out and eat it. That was the choice, man; guest of honor got that. So I remember
doing that, at the King of Thailand’s summer home, palace in Hoi Hin, Thailand. And of
course I went to Bangkok. I went down to, Patia beach, went there. Never got out of
country, a lot of guys went to Australia or Hong Kong, places like that, but I just stayed
kind of local.

JB: Did you have any down time when, like when you were upcountry, coming
back?

TM: Oh yes. My down time is when I volunteered to go on FAC missions and
stuff like that, because some of the places I needed to go there was nobody going there or
it was too hot, I mean like that, “too hot,” that means too much action going on. So, yes,
I just kind of stayed down. So I’d volunteer to help out whichever way I could. Got bored just sitting around doing nothing.

JB: Was there anything to do around there?

TM: Not really. One time they had a little beauty contest in Long Tieng. All the tribes’ people, from all these different tribes all over Laos, kind of met there for a beauty contest. All these different costumes, and they had that there. I said, “Oh, boy, get to see some girls.” They were just Meo tribes’ people in their costumes, but they called it a beauty contest. Got to see that. A lot of times, when I went to a site, usually have to wind up visiting with the village chief, called him, the old senior guy, the old man, and he was a civilian. And they had these urns filled up with like rice hulls, but filled up with what they call Lao Lao, real, real strong homemade booze, big old long straws sticking out of there, for however many people were around there, and you started sucking on that straw until you passed out, and you had to do that because that’s what he wanted you to do. I remember doing that. That night I had to go out into the jungle to evade? I had a hangover in the middle of night from drinking that stuff. That was not fun, evading through the jungle with a hangover and I was probably still drunk. Yes, remember that.

JB: So did you have any encounters with, see any wildlife over there? Snakes?

TM: Yes, well you see, not too much. Didn’t really get into the jungle except that, well a few times. But you would see snakes or I think I’d seen some wild boars like once, maybe some monkeys, but there wasn’t a lot of, I guess, with all the action going around, wherever I had to go, there was usually more people closer to the sites. Animals wouldn’t come close to the sites I didn’t think, too much.

JB: Now, I guess working with the Paru, did you know Bill Lear at all?

TM: Bill Lear?

JB: Yes. He was CIA bureau chief in Long Tieng, I believe.

TM: Bill?

JB: He’s another person who’s done an interview with us.

TM: His name sounds familiar. I can only remember the first names of the guys that were there. There was John, and it seems like there might have been a guy named--

Do you know when he was over there?

JB: I could look it up, but it was, I think it was.
TM: But Bill’s a pretty common name.

JB: I think it was ’68 he left, if I remember right.

TM: He might have been there when I was there. I kind of vaguely remember a

guy named Bill, it might have been him; I’m not sure. But you know, we were all just

there, and we didn’t really bother any other bodies business. They wouldn’t bother our

business. We just kind of worked together and we didn’t really fraternize much. I stayed

by myself and they stayed in their shack, and the only time I needed to talk to them was if

I wanted to go somewhere. I’d just asked them. “Okay, no problem.” We didn’t really

get to be real buddy, buddy with them or anything.

JB: So there was basically no social interaction with some of the other Americans

around?

TM: There weren’t really many there. Just the, but the guys, the Air American

pilots and the Cas guys, CIA guys, would kind of hang out together. They’d do all the

fraternizing. I felt like it wasn’t my business to interfere with what they’re doing. I’ll

just stay by myself and the only time I need to talk to them is when I want to go

somewhere. Mind my own business. They’re all partying. Whatever they’re doing, I

didn’t do it. Don’t get involved. I just kind of stayed by myself and keep my nose clean.

As long as they let me go where I wanted to go.

JB: Okay, winding down I guess, getting ready to head home, I guess you did a

standard year tour over there?

TM: Yes.

JB: What was it like heading home?

TM: Well, I can remember, they might have pulled me out of going upcountry

maybe a month or so before I was going to head back. We had these short; when you’re

short you get a string around your neck. Tied knots in it, or take a knot out, I guess, when

you got thirty days, you’ve got thirty knots, and then everyday you pull one knot out until

you got hardly any knots left in your short. You go like five days to go home or

something, and then you’re really short. You’ve only got five knots left in your string, I

can remember having one of those, and I got short and I go man, I’m ready to go back,

but I’m going to miss, especially my interpreter guys. So they gave Buddhas, all kinds of

Buddhas, they’re supposed to protect you. I had a collection of those things, all different
kinds of little Buddhas to protect me from danger. I remember that. I brought those back
with me. Being short and coming back, I was ready to go. That was a pretty harrowing
experience. It was, at that time I didn’t think it was bad, because I was young, I was like
23 years old, 22 I was gung ho, but I was ready to come out of there.

JB: And this was about summer ’67?
TM: Kind of missed home, I guess. I missed round eyes. I missed good food. I
missed a lot of things. I missed the USA.

JB: What did you think of the food there?
TM: It wasn’t, I really don’t remember. I remember down country, at Udorn and
stuff, the chow hall was probably all right. They probably fed us pretty good, but
upcountry, man some of the stuff I ate, I don’t even know what it was. I mean that stuff,
mostly the Lao food, lot of rice and there were things kind of like, oh a lot of fish.
Wasn’t very tasty, that food that we ate upcountry, but they fed us pretty good on the
base. We’d go downtown a lot because there was a restaurant downtown in downtown
Udorn, that had Kobe beef. It was like fillet mignon, about two inches thick, cheap man,
and that was delicious. I’m telling you, we’d go downtown every time we get, when I
was down country to go to that restaurant to get that Kobe beef. That’s good.

JB: It’s interesting to hear Lao food is just not tasty compared to--I’ve had
Vietnamese. I’ve had Thai. I love them both, just sort of.

TM: Well, it wasn’t for me. I don’t even like Chinese food. It’s all rice,
vegetable stuff and all--I can remember eating monkey balls down in Bangkok,
restaurants in Bangkok, they would serve monkey balls, those are all right, they don’t
taste bad, that was all right.

JB: So, getting ready to go home, we left out of Udorn did you, I guess what
route did you take getting home?

TM: How did that work? Well, we had to go to Saigon I guess, and caught
another civilian airplane back, probably out of Saigon. I remember we landed one time,
the only time in my whole life I’ve ever been to Hawaii. We landed in Hawaii and I had
one of those bottles of Seagram’s Crown Royal, on the airplane. I put it in the little
pouch, back of the seat in front of me, put it in there. I have yet to get off the airplane or
clean the airplane, and so when I got back on the airplane, only stayed in the terminal
probably for half an hour, plane was refueled ready to go, we took off, I looked in that pouch, and that was gone. My Seagram’s Crown Royal was gone, man. That was what I experienced in Hawaii, getting off the airplane and getting my Crown Royal stolen.

JB: Arriving back in the States, what was the reception like?

TM: Okay, I remember that. Of course I had my Class A dress blues on, with my beret and my--I was only a sergeant at that time, three rows of ribbons already, jump wings, my Thai Paru wings, my blouse boots, spit-shined boots. I thought I was cool, and got in the airport, nobody even looked at you. If they looked at you they looked away, I go, “Whoa.” I couldn’t figure out what was wrong. Nobody said, “Hi” or even--Well, there were a few veterans around, guys around there, GIs around and we all talked, but the civilians that saw us as--I guess we can’t land in San Francisco. Wouldn’t have anything to do with you, and surprised me. I didn’t know what to expect when I got back, but I had a hard time accepting the fact that I’m not--Where’s my parade? Where’s my welcome home? I mean, I just come back to the United States and nobody even acknowledges that you’re alive! They won’t even look at you. Here I am, all dressed up in my Class A uniform, with all my decorations and nobody even said nothing about it, except the other military people. The civilians, until I got actually to my home and my family, there was no welcome, no nothing, no, “Good job guys! Glad you’re back,” or nothing like that. I couldn’t believe it.

JB: Now, I guess, being overseas, had you been able to keep up on events going on in the States, current news, etc.? Were you aware of the anti-war sentiment at all?

TM: Well, yes I watched TV after I got home for the first time.

JB: I’m sorry to interrupt, but back when you were still overseas?

TM: When I was overseas? I didn’t know what was going on in the States. I had no idea what was going on. I didn’t know that, I guess the only news we got was in Air Force Times, I think, but I hardly even read that. When I was down country, I might have looked at one a few times, but I don’t remember hearing about any anti-war sentiment. I was more interested in having a good time. I was back down country and I wanted to go downtown and I wanted to let the steam off, and didn’t know anything about the anti-war sentiment until I got back to the States, turned on the TV. No, we didn’t know. We were kind of kept in the dark over there about what was going on here,
at least while I was out there. I don’t know if that was by my own choosing not to read
the papers or anything that were available, but I just didn’t know anything about that. I
thought that everybody thought we were going to be doing a good job over there, and
here we were doing our job and everyone thought we were winning the war, and I
thought we were winning the war, but apparently we weren’t, and they let us know when
we got back that we shouldn’t ever have been there, I tell you.

JB: Did you have any incidents like that?
TM: Any what?
JB: Any incidents of people saying something to you?
TM: Oh, yes people would say nasty things to you. Of course I was still in the
military. This was during my thirty days or so after I got back, before I went on to my
next duty station. I went to England Air Force Base Louisiana after that, but during my
thirty days in California, at home, is when I started finding out that we weren’t really
appreciated, and then I decided I just better get back to being in the military again instead
of being off-duty and go with my real family, the guys in the 1st Air Commando Wing
and go back to work.

JB: So, heading to England Air Force Base after that, what were you doing there?
How much time did you have left in?
TM: The same crew or the same team that we had at Hurlbert. We were
reassigned to England, and so when I got back a lot of the guys that I knew from Hurlbert
were there at England and we just took up where we left off. Started more advanced
training with different equipment that was coming out, and we just went on a lot of
operations, training operations with the Army and stuff. We’d support different
maneuvers like maneuvers, what did we call them? Practice missions, all over the
country, and we’d do that there. I can remember that, I got involved in the, after I learned
how to skydive from the Paru over in Long Tieng, I made my first free-fall exit with a
static line, I mean a free fall-style exit, like jumping out of an Air America C-47. I
jumped out of the door, and you had to spread yourself out to a free-fall position. I can
remember going out, being out too quick on spreading out when I went out the door, my
hand hit the side of the door as I was exiting the airplane, almost broke my hand. Good
thing I had a static line at that time because it pulled the rip cord, but then from
eventually learning how to free-fall, lot of guys in combat patrol team, were a member of
the USPA, the United States Parachute Association, civilian group. They were in the
military, but they were still a member of that. Well, they had started up a sport parachute
team. Air Commandos sport parachute team, and anybody who wants to learn how to,
wants to free-fall, instead of doing the military, we could do it off duty and well, actually,
ot off duty. But as a sideline to what our normal job was on this team, we started
practicing for competition, meets and stuff to go to compete with different teams like
ours. And I remember going to Stead Air Force base, no Wendover Air Force Base,
Utah, in KC-123, a 123 with two jet engines on the end. Jumping out from about 23
thousand feet for a ninety-second free-fall for an air show demonstration in Wendover. I
remember that. Also had to go up to West Point, New York. Practicing for a meet up
there I broke my foot. Practicing for a meet with the West Point team, they let me lay on
the ground for two hours while they kept practicing, up and down in the airplane until
they said all right, we’ll take you to the hospital now, we’re done practicing. That was
with the Air Commando sport parachute team. Used to do a lot of that stuff like that.
Well, after I got back from Vietnam and got into, out of England, before I got out.

JB: When did you finally leave the service?

TM: In June of 1968. I got out because I never did get my opportunity to go to
Air Force pilot training school. If I would have re-up’ed, I thought I would be able to go
to that, but they said, “No.” We’re going to send you back to Southeast Asia if you re-
up.” So I wound up getting out, and used the G.I. Bill to get my commercial pilot’s
license. I had gotten my private license at the Aero club in England Air Force Base.
They had a little Cessna 150 or something. So I learned how to fly in the Aero club at
England, and when I got out, because I had a private pilot’s license and wanted to go to
commercial, they let me use the G.I. Bill to get my commercial pilot’s license. So fat
chance I had of getting hired by one of the airlines to be an airline pilot when all the guys
coming back from Vietnam with B-52 rating and KC-135 ratings were getting all the
jobs. So that did me a lot of good, getting a commercial pilot’s license.

JB: Did you get any flight time flying with Air America?

TM: Oh yes, as a matter of fact because, I must have gotten my license before I
went over, because when I was upcountry with Air America guys, I told them that I had a
pilot’s license, or I was a pilot. I said, “Can I have some stick time?” I said, “Do you
have an instructor permit or instructor rating so I can log time?” They said yes. So they
let me do time, right seat time on C-47s, C-46s, turboporters, all of those planes that we
flew around and helicopters and I logged time on my civilian logbook for the aircraft that
we were actually flying around in combat zones in Air America, I put it on my civilian
logbook for my personal flight time. No questions asked. As long as I was a pilot I
could fly their airplanes, they didn’t care. I didn’t care if I was even rated for it. I said,
“I’ve never flown one of these before.” “Well, that’s all right.” Go like, do this, do that.
Set your nifold pressure here. They would let me do stick time, they wouldn’t let me take
off and land, they let me fly it. You’re doing good. I said, “Well, thanks.”

JB: Now, just before you got out, of course, Tet at the end of January. When did
you hear about that, your feelings?

TM: You know, honestly when I got out, I went back to college, and I kind of
dismissed all that out of my mind. I just wanted to forget about it. I didn’t pay any
attention any more, seriously about that. I wanted to forget it. So the Tet Offensive, I
didn’t even know about no Tet Offensive in ’68 when I got out. I wanted to forget it
because of they way I was treated. I just wanted to start doing other things; start working
on my commercial pilot’s license, stuff like that. Went back to school, and just didn’t
even want to think about it. Didn’t care. In fact I didn’t even meet any of the guys I was
in the service with until just within the last two years. From being on the Internet, I’ve
found out some websites for some of our guys, the Parachutists Association and got
pictures on the Internet. My picture is even on the website and I didn’t get in contact
with these guys until two years ago. After all these years, they’re still out there and I’m
finding them all again. And now we’re starting to invite each other over to their house.
We’re going to have a reunion, start getting together again after all these years. I just
completely forgot about all that. That’s probably why I’m talking so much, because I
never talked to anybody about all this stuff. But now I’m getting back with my buddies
from the service, eventually, soon, in the near future, we’ll get together in person. I’m
looking forward to that because we can rehash all this stuff and we can really rehash
because, I’ll remember more about it when I get with them. Because this is the first time
I’ve ever talked much about this. I can’t remember exactly how everything happened
because I hadn’t even thought about it till now. I got the opportunity to talk, and I
appreciate it.

    JB: We’re glad to have you. Anything else about your experience in Southeast
Asia you’d like to talk about?

    TM: Well, I just want to say one thing; that I’m glad that us veterans, us Vietnam
veterans are starting to be listened to. It seems like we’re starting, at least I now feel like
are being appreciated. I appreciate that, that you all are taking your time to listen to us,
and you actually act like you care about us and that’s new, and that makes me feel good.

    Thanks.

    JB: Thank you. This will officially end the interview with Mr. Terry Maroste.