Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I’m conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Charles Pardue. Today is February 27th, 2003. It’s 9:10 AM Central Standard Time. I’m in Lubbock, Texas, at the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech University and Mr. Pardue you are in Cookeville, Tennessee, is that correct?

Charles Pardue: That’s correct.

RV: Okay. Sir, let’s start with some background information on yourself. Could you tell me when and where you were born?

CP: I was born in Athens, Tennessee, in 1941.

RV: Okay. Did you grow up in Athens?

CP: Until I was about twelve and then we moved to Baxter, which is near Cookeville.

RV: What do you remember about your years there in Athens?

CP: Well, it was a good time, nothing special.

RV: All right, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

CP: One of each.

RV: What did your parents do?

CP: My father was a wholesale grocery and my mother was just a homemaker.

RV: Do you remember anything about your schooling there? What kind of student were you?

CP: Oh, I’ve always been above average, of course. I just went to school, public school.
RV: Okay. You said you moved to just outside Cookeville after age twelve. Is that where you went to high school?

CP: Yes, Baxter Seminary.

RV: I'm sorry.

CP: Baxter Seminary.

RV: Baxter Seminary?

CP: Yes.

RV: What do you remember about those times?

CP: Oh, it was, what do you mean what do I remember about it?

RV: Well, tell me what kind of student you were in high school and did you participate in extracurricular activities.

CP: High school was an exciting time of life. Yes, I participated in basketball and football.

RV: How about academics? What were your favorite subjects?

CP: Probably algebra and Latin.

RV: Did you have a particular pension for knowing algebra and Latin? Did it come easy to you?

CP: No. Nothing ever came easy, just sit down and grind it out.

RV: Did you have any jobs while you were young?

CP: Yes. The high school I went to was a boarding school and I worked all the time doing something.

RV: Can you describe some of those jobs?

CP: Just general maintenance. We would do anything from cleaning the latrine to stock the boiler to build the buildings.

RV: Okay. So, you worked there on campus of the academy?

CP: Yes.

RV: What years were you there?

CP: High school, it would have been ’54 to ’59.

RV: ’54 to ’59, okay. Was there an influence upon you to go to college after high school? Did your parents emphasize education?

CP: Yes, I was encouraged to go to college.
RV: Okay.
CP: And did so.
RV: Where did you attend?
CP: Tennessee Tech.
RV: Okay.
CP: At that time, it was called the Tennessee Public Technique Institute. It was kind of weird. Every time I left the school, they closed it or changed its name. After I went to high school, they changed from a private to a public school and went from Baxter Seminary to Upperman High School, and then when I graduated from college, it went from Tennessee Polytechnic Institute to Tennessee Technological University.
RV: Did you go all four years there at Tennessee Tech?
CP: Yes.
RV: What was your major?
CP: Mechanical Engineering.
RV: Were you good at engineering? Is that something that you chose on purpose or was it more to just try to get a job after college?
CP: It was just the thing to do at the time.
RV: So, a lot of people were engineer majors?
CP: At this place, yes. Over half of the school is engineering.
RV: Okay. What was your specialty in engineering? What were you particularly good at?
CP: None of it, just any of it.
RV: Any of it. Okay.
CP: Just played along with the game.
RV: Okay. What kind of college student were you?
CP: C student.
RV: Okay. Did you have aspirations to join the military while you were at Tennessee Tech or is this something that you really had no intentions of at this point?
CP: I didn’t have any intentions of it at that time. I was in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) for two years for mandatory, but that was it.
RV: Okay. What kind of ROTC was it?
CP: Army.

RV: Army, okay. That was mandatory, so you joined that because it was mandatory?

CP: Well, you had a choice of that or not going to school.

RV: Right. So, that was a pretty easy choice. You decided to join so you’d stay in school?

CP: Pardon.

RV: You decided to join so you could stay in school?

CP: Well, like I said, you had to take it. You didn’t have a choice.

RV: What was that experience like for you? How did you adapt to the military kind of regiment of it?

CP: It was okay. I joined the drill team, was in the color guard.

RV: When did you graduate from Tennessee Tech?

CP: ’65.

RV: What did you know in 1965 of what the United States was doing in Southeast Asia? Did you keep up with kind of world affairs and U.S. foreign policy?

CP: I tried to avoid it at all costs.

RV: Did you really? Why?

CP: Foreign affairs just isn’t my bag.

RV: Okay. Did you know what the United States was—were you aware that the U.S. was in Southeast Asia?

CP: Yes.

RV: Do you remember how you felt about what the United States was doing there at the time?

CP: No, didn’t feel much about it at all. It was just one of those things that went on.

RV: Okay. Well, so when you graduated in 1965, what did you do? Did you go to work or did you go back home or what?

CP: I avoided that.

RV: Avoided what?

CP: Work.
CP: In ’65, ’66—well, right after I got out of college, I went into the Peace Corps for two years.

RV: Okay. Where did you go?

CP: Philippines.

RV: Why did you join the Peace Corps?

CP: Beat working for a living.

RV: Okay. Was that what a lot of your friends were doing or was this something that you did kind of individually?

CP: I had signed up for OCC (Operations Control Center) and they never did call me and this thing came along that said going to train in Hawaii for three months and then go to Philippines for two years and it sounded like a good deal.

RV: Can you tell me about your experiences in the Philippines? What was that like?

CP: I had a good time. I was part of—what was it—Rural Enhancement Group that went over. They had schoolteacher groups and then this other kind of group and I was this other kind of group. It was the first year or two in the Marcos Administration before it got really ragged.

RV: What did you guys do in the Philippines? What was your group doing?

CP: Mostly we just spread good will. We were part of the agriculture and industrial program, supposed to help them grow better bananas and better rice.

RV: Were you able to do that?

CP: Not to much extent. We helped more with the school building and water works than anything else.

RV: Can you describe some of what you did with the schools?

CP: They had building programs and we would go in and encourage the people to work together.

RV: What people, the students or the school administration or what?

CP: The people in the communities.

RV: What would you encourage them to do?

CP: Work together to get the job done.
RV: What job was that, building new schools or improving the curriculum or what?
CP: Building the schools.
RV: Okay.
CP: There were other groups there that were working with the schoolteachers.
RV: Okay. So, you were more building facilities and construction and things like that?
CP: Yes.
RV: Did you enjoy being over there?
CP: Of course.
RV: How did you adapt to the kind of tropical climate and the tropical atmosphere?
CP: I didn’t have any problems at all. I had a house on the beach and just enjoyed the sunsets.
RV: Did you make any good friends while you were there?
CP: Several. I still communicate with one or two of them.
RV: Do you really? So, you were there from 1965 to 1967?
CP: ’66 and ’67.
RV: ’66 and ’67. Okay. Now, the Philippines is in Southeast Asia so you’re right there beside Vietnam, which is in the middle of a war while you were there. What did you know of what was happening next door in Vietnam?
CP: It didn’t bother me at all. It wasn’t influenced by it at all.
RV: Did you guys here about what was happening?
CP: Yes. I wasn’t near one of the military bases. It wasn’t constant information.
RV: Did you remember any of the Peace Corps workers, you guys kind of saying, were you more anti war, pro-war, or neutral?
CP: Some of them were all three. I was neutral.
RV: You were neutral?
CP: Yes.
RV: Did you think that you would have to serve at Vietnam at this point or were you hoping to avoid military service?
CP: None of the above.
RV: How did you feel about that? You’re a prime age to get drafted.
CP: Oh, it’s a prime age to get drafted, but the course of college and everything else was usually an exemption.
RV: Okay. So, did you expect to have to go into the war, or did you expect to be able to not have to do it?
CP: Neither.
RV: So then what did you expect to happen to you?
CP: Neither. I didn’t expect to get drafted and I didn’t expect to worry about if I did.
RV: What were your plans for after the Peace Corps?
CP: Get a job, live the rest of my life.
RV: Did you plan to go back to Tennessee?
CP: Yes.
RV: Is that in fact what you did?
CP: Yes.
RV: What did you do when you went back home?
CP: Fiddled around for a summer and then joined the Air Force.
RV: So, why did you join the Air Force when you were trying to get a job or kind of to work there in Tennessee the rest of your life?
CP: It just seemed like the thing to do at the time. It had been avoided until that time and it was still going on.
RV: Did you feel like a call to duty or was it just an opportunity for work for you?
CP: All of the above.
RV: When you went into the Air Force, where did you go for your training?
CP: Lackland.
RV: Can you tell me a little bit about that? What was the basic training experience like for you?
CP: It was pretty good.
RV: Did you find it hard to adapt to the military discipline of basic training?
CP: No.
RV: What kind of training did you receive there?
CP: Just basic.
RV: What is physical or was it classroom?
CP: We had some classroom. We had some basic air force history and we had a salute, how to say sir. Physical education, what else? That was about it.
RV: What was the most challenging or difficult part of basic training for you?
CP: It was just all part of it. I didn’t have any hard difficulties anywhere. It was a pleasant experience.
RV: Do you remember any memorable incidents from your basic training?
CP: No.
RV: Was anyone ever injured or killed during your training?
CP: Yes.
RV: What happened?
CP: Went up and fell out of physical training one day.
RV: He died right there in front of everyone?
CP: Oh no, they hauled him off.
RV: What kind of weapons training?
RV: I’m sorry.
CP: What kind of what?
RV: What kind of weapons training did you have in basic?
CP: We shot rifles, M-16s probably.
RV: M-16s. How were you at handling the weapons? Was it easy for you or was that difficult?
CP: It was okay. I wasn’t at the top of the class.
RV: How did your parents feel about you being in the Air Force?
CP: No problem.
RV: Did you have a lot of contact with them?
CP: With my parents?
RV: Mm-hmm. Yes, sir.
CP: Just called them once a week or wrote a letter once a month.
RV: How about your instructors in basic? Do you remember what they were like?

CP: They were easy to get along with for the most part.

RV: Were they Vietnam veterans?

CP: I don’t recollect it being discussed.

RV: Was Vietnam ever discussed at Lackland during your basic?

CP: Not that much.

RV: So, after you finished your basic, where did you go?

CP: Shepard.

RV: What did you do there at Sheppard?

CP: Taught to be a loadmaster.

RV: Now, is that the job position that you had requested that you wanted to do or was that something assigned to you?

CP: It was assigned.

RV: How did you feel about that position?

CP: I had an excellent attitude toward it.

RV: Really? Why?

CP: Well, I didn’t know at the time, but I found out later it was the best job in the whole Air Force.

RV: Oh, really?

CP: Yeah, it was the whole job of the Air Force to get me and my cargo someplace on time.

RV: What kind of training did you have to prepare yourself to be a load master at Sheppard?

CP: They taught you how to count boxes, figure the center gravity of an airplane and tie up parachutes and what else did we do? That’s about it that I remember.

RV: Are there any incidents that stand out in your mind from your training at Sheppard?

CP: Not really.

RV: Now is this at Sheppard the first time you flew in an airplane?

CP: No.
RV: Did you do flying at Lackland during your basic?
CP: No.
RV: Okay. So you had flown before going?
CP: Well, I got to the Philippines and back.
RV: Right. So, tell me what it was—were you doing your training on C-130s there at Sheppard?
CP: No, 141.
RV: 141s, okay. Tell me about the 141. What did you think of it as an airplane?
CP: I thought it was great.
RV: Can you describe kind of what your duties were inside the 141?
CP: Count boxes, make sure they didn’t move around. You had people. You had to take care of the people.
RV: Did you find the training difficult at all?
CP: Nope.
RV: How long was your training at Sheppard?
CP: Probably six weeks.
RV: This is in 1968, is that right?
CP: It would have been in January of ’69.
RV: Okay, at Sheppard. You joined the Air Force in ’68, right?
CP: In late.
RV: Late ’68, okay. So did you know—was there any talk about you guys going into the war zone to Vietnam or did you just kind of wherever they put you, they put you?
CP: Both. There wasn’t much talk about going to Vietnam.
RV: There was not or it was?
CP: There wasn’t. Some of them did, but it wasn’t much talk about it.
RV: How did you find out where you were going at this point?
CP: The end of the training they gave you, cut you orders to go someplace.
RV: What did you get?
CP: McGuire.
RV: McGuire. I’m sorry?
CP: McGuire in New Jersey.
RV: Okay. When you got to McGuire, what were your duties there?
CP: Load master.
RV: You still on the 141?
CP: Yes.
RV: Tell me a little about what you did there at McGuire, besides being a load
master, but you know, how many flights per day and was this still training or was this
you’re back into your regular job now?
CP: Okay. This is regular job. We would fly missions from here and there
depending on who and where needed to go to. We’d fly local domestic flights in the
United States. We’d go to Vietnam or Jakarta. Not Jakarta, that other place. Tehran,
Iran, anywhere in the world we’d fly.
RV: Were you sent TDY (temporary duty) to Taiwan or to the Philippines to do
your flights into Vietnam?
CP: No. We always operated out of home base. In this particular outfit, we would
just take an airplane and go. They had a shuttle type thing where you’d take an airplane
to Anchorage and somebody else would take it into Japan. Then somebody else would fly
it into Vietnam and somebody else would fly it into Bangkok and then somebody would
bring it back. When the next plane came along, then you’d take the plane—they kept the
planes moving with the crews, top of every 8 hours.
RV: Right. Now were you on board most of that time or did you stay with one
crew that rotated in and out of these planes?
CP: We would stay with one crew for each trip and when we got home, the crew
might change.
RV: How many times did you fly into Vietnam during your tour at McGuire?
CP: At least once a month.
RV: How long were you there doing this at McGuire?
CP: About a year.
RV: So you had maybe twelve trips into Vietnam?
CP: At least. Sometimes it was more than that depending on what was going on.
RV: What was your impression of Vietnam when you first got there?
CP: It was just another tropical place similar to the Philippines.
RV: But, this is a war going on there. How did you feel about flying into a war zone?

CP: I was never where the war was. I was always in support of it.

RV: I’m sorry?

CP: I was always in support of it, never in the battle itself.

RV: Right, but you’re flying over the country where there is fighting. Did you guys ever take fire from the ground?

CP: No.

RV: Which bases did you fly into Vietnam?

CP: While I was on 141, it was mostly Saigon.

RV: Just Saigon, what did you think of Saigon?

CP: It was just another airport. Sometimes busy, sometimes not.

RV: Did you ever stay overnight at Saigon?

CP: No.

RV: So, you would basically fly in. How long would it typically take you to turn over when you landed and then and until you took off again?

CP: Couple of hours sometimes.

RV: What were your duties when you guys would land? What would you do?

CP: Supervise the unloading and loading of the airplane.

RV: You were never able to take any leisure time and go into Saigon itself?

CP: Oh, no.

RV: Did you have any specific warnings or anything that they would tell you about flying into Saigon that you could be mortared or rocketed at any point or anything like that?

CP: No.

RV: Okay. So did you have any feelings at all about being in Vietnam in a war zone or was it just another stop for you?

CP: Just extra pay.

RV: Okay, all right. So, after you finished your tour of McGuire, where did you go?

CP: Went to Pope for training on 130s.
RV: Okay. How long did that last?
CP: About three or four weeks.
RV: Did you like the 130s better than the 141s?
CP: No better or no worse. We used the same pallet.
RV: Same thing?
CP: Same cargo, it’s just a different plane.
RV: How much did your job change on the 130?
CP: None.
RV: Once you finished your training on the 130s at Pope, where did you go from there?
CP: CCK.
RV: Is this TDY?
CP: No, it was permanent.
RV: It was a permanent transfer, okay. Tell me about CCK, what was that like?
CP: It was like any other flying job that I had, sit around until they got a flight and you take off and go. Now on it, after we got there, we would go in-country for about 180 days.
RV: Where would you go usually when you flew into Vietnam?
CP: Saigon.
RV: Was that your home base in Vietnam?
CP: Yes.
RV: Would you stay there for a 180 days in Saigon?
CP: Yes.
RV: Can you tell me a little bit about your impressions of Saigon itself? Did you stay in the city or did you stay on the airbase?
CP: When I first went there, we stayed downtown.
RV: In a hotel?
CP: Yes, in a hotel. Then, the next time I went back then they were staying on base all the time.
RV: What did you think of Saigon when you were living downtown in that hotel?
CP: It was just a fun place to be.
RV: What would you guys do?
CP: Usually you’d go to bed and get up and fly the next day.
RV: Really?
CP: Occasionally get out on the local economy and go to a restaurant or something.
RV: What did you think of the Vietnamese civilians, the people who live there?
CP: They were just typical oriental people. Being in the Philippines for a while, it wasn’t a shock to the system of any kind.
RV: Did you find the Vietnamese friendly toward Americans or were they indifferent?
CP: The ones that I were talking to were friendly.
RV: Really? Okay. What would you guys do for entertainment while you were there?
CP: What would we do for entertainment? We’d have a beer and go to bed and get up and fly again the next day.
RV: Did you enjoy your time in Saigon?
CP: Not sure that’s the right word. It was just part of the job.
RV: How did the rest of your unit feel? Did they have the same attitude that you did or were things differently for them?
CP: It depends on the age of the kids.
RV: What do you remember about your fellow flyers there?
CP: Some of them I trained with and flew with both in basic and at McGuire. A lot of the rest of them were in the same vintage. Some of the them had been around for several years and it was an unpleasant experience for them. While we were in Taiwan, occasionally we’d have the opportunity to get off base and do things, see some of the local sights, go up to Sun Moon Lake, take off on the weekends.
RV: What did you think of the Taiwanese?
CP: They were nice people.
RV: Were they different from the Vietnamese that you could tell?
CP: They were more positive attitude towards the American personnel, yes.
RV: The first time you were in Saigon, you stayed downtown at a hotel. Then you said you stayed on the airbase itself.

CP: Yes.

RV: What were you quarters like there at Tan Son Nhut Airbase?

CP: It was open barracks.

RV: How many men were in there with you?

CP: Well, you never knew, but any given time some of them are all out flying somewhere. There was probably fifteen or thirty.

RV: Was it air-conditioned barracks?

CP: Sometimes.

RV: Okay. Did you transfer from—I’m sorry?

CP: Sometimes it was, sometimes it wasn’t.

RV: Did you transfer from barrack to barrack?

CP: No, just different times when I went back and forth.

RV: Oh, okay. So, you just stay in different places.

CP: Yes.

RV: How many 180-day stops in Vietnam did you have actually?

CP: I don’t know. I ended up with about 1500 hours on the airplane.

RV: Let’s talk a little about what you hauled around Vietnam and kind of where you landed and things like that. Can you describe a typical day for me?

CP: You check in, get an airplane, take off and fly somewhere, land five or ten times, end up back home eight hours later.

RV: What kind of cargo would you carry?

CP: Soap, fuse bombs, rations, ammunition, anything.

RV: Was there any particular cargo that you disliked carrying?

CP: No.

RV: Anything that you particularly liked to carry?

CP: Yes.

RV: Which was?

CP: Anything that prevented passengers.

RV: Oh really, why is that?
They were always a problem.

Well, they wanted to talk or eat or drink coffee, just the general nuisance.

Were you in charge of making sure they stayed strapped in or whatever they were doing?

Yes.

I take it they weren’t that cooperative at times?

You’ve been talking to people. Tell me about it.

Well, I’ve never heard that actually before. What were they like?

Boxes don’t talk back.

Okay. Did they have a problem listening to the load master taking your orders basically of what to do?

Hardly ever.

Oh really?

They just needed more attention than the boxes.

Okay. Did you ever carry any dead bodies or wounded men?

Yes.

How’d you feel about that?

It’s just part of the job.

Did you or any members of your crew have difficulty carrying some of the American dead around?

Not that I’m aware of.

Tell me about on the airplane itself, where would you sit and how many people were on your crew?

There was a pilot and a copilot and the Engineer and the load master and occasionally, one of anything else, four or five people, sometimes seven.

What was your relationship like with your crewmembers?

It was pretty good. I got along with most of them.

Did you form any special relationships with any of them?

No.

Okay.
CP: Mostly it was because you wouldn’t fly with the same people even when you flew in-country with the crew. Sometimes they’d jerk the pilots out for administrative and stuff and they’d swap us around just as they needed us. You hardly ever flew with the same people, seven times in a row.

RV: Really? When you said that you would fly to five or six different places around Vietnam in one day, were these considered separate missions for you or is this one big mission?

CP: Well, I’m not sure what the answer to that question is. It was just that’s what we did that day. It could be hauling anything to anywhere.

RV: Did you ever stay overnight at any of these stops?

CP: Very seldom unless it was Da Nang or Cam Ranh, some of the bigger bases.

RV: What were those bases like, Da Nang and Cam Ranh?

CP: The facilities weren’t quite as expensive.

RV: Did you have access to officers clubs or the enlisted clubs?

CP: Almost all the bases where we would spend a night had an enlisted club.

RV: Would you guys hang out there?

CP: Some.

RV: Really? How were you received by other people who were on the base? Were they kind to you when you guys headed to land and stay overnight?

CP: Part of the job. Yeah, they expected us.

RV: What kind of weapons did you carry on board?

CP: We had probably two 38s specials.

RV: Did you actually have one yourself?

CP: Yes. I had one. I can’t remember whether the engineer had one or not.

RV: Did you ever have to use it?

CP: Main fact is everybody may have had one. No.

RV: You never used it?

CP: No.

RV: Did you ever see the enemy at all or take any kind of ground fire?

CP: Not where I was flying. We were exposed to it a couple of times, but it never did happen.
RV: Okay, to your knowledge, you were never shot at?
CP: Right.
RV: When you were at these bases, did you ever take any kind of attack there?
CP: That’s what I said. They don’t, not while I was there. Never before and after
the next airplane would not leave.
RV: Do you remember any particular incidents that happened that are memorable
to you when you think back about your time in-country and what you were doing?
CP: There were a couple of times. One of them we were doing a test ride, loaded
bombs on board, I mean armed fused bombs. Then another time, a couple of us were
assigned to Cam Ranh Bay. I never did remember what it was for. We went down and
played on the beaches, rented boats and water skied in Cam Ranh Bay over the bomb
holes.
RV: Really?
CP: Yeah. We were afraid you’d rent one of the sailboats and then it was real
good with sails because you couldn’t get within three hundred feet of the bridge. It was a
free fire zone.
RV: You got motorboats and you water-skied?
CP: Sure.
RV: Did you have opportunity to do this—?
CP: Just once.
RV: Just one time, okay. How much contact did you have with home while you
were there?
CP: With who?
RV: With home, with your parents, friends?
CP: Called the MARS (Military Affiliate Radio System) line every now and then,
and write letters.
RV: What were those MARS calls like?
CP: It was pretty good.
RV: How many did you get to make?
CP: Anytime you wanted to. Scheduled it like anything else.
RV: How did your parents—I’m sorry?
CP: Scheduled it like anything else.

RV: How did you parents feel about you being in Vietnam?

CP: Worried most of the time.

RV: Would you tell them that your job is dangerous or did you just kind of try to keep all that from them?

CP: Told them there wasn’t any danger to it.

RV: Okay. Did you keep up with the news back in the United States or did you not have that opportunity?

CP: Yes, we had that opportunity.

RV: How would you do that?

CP: Radio, television, *Stars and Stripes*.

RV: How about the use of drugs and alcohol? How prevalent was that that you witnessed?

CP: I didn’t participate in it and didn’t worry about it.

RV: Did you ever see any drug use?

CP: Not that I know of.

RV: Okay. How about the use of alcohol? Was that prevalent?

CP: Oh, of course.

RV: Where would you guys do your drinking? Was it at the clubs after flying all day?

CP: Only when we were alone or with somebody. You couldn’t drink within fifty feet of an airplane.

RV: So, you would do this in your barracks or wherever?

CP: Barracks and a club, mostly in the clubs downtown on the base on the strip.

RV: How much contact did you have with the locals? Did you interact with them at all besides your time in Saigon?

CP: In Vietnam or in the—?

RV: In Vietnam.

CP: I didn’t have a lot of contact with them.

RV: Did your impression of the Vietnamese—?
CP: Basically being on base is they didn’t let us off much after the first five or six months.

RV: Did your impression of the Vietnamese change any during your time in Asia?

CP: No. We would haul them around every now and then.

RV: You’re talking about some of the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops?

CP: Well, we’d haul troops and/or civilians.

RV: What was that like? What was your contact like with the ARVN troops?

CP: We’d get on the airplane and we’d fly them someplace and they’d get off.

RV: What was your impression of those guys?

CP: Just another soldier.

RV: Were you able to talk with them or did you guys avoid that?

CP: Well, we didn’t have much choice. They didn’t speak much English and I didn’t speak much Vietnamese.

RV: Did your airplane use special tactics at all that you were aware of and your landings and take offs in and out of these airbases?

CP: Yes. They would go in, stay, and come out fast.

RV: Was that effective?

CP: Apparently.

RV: Did you guys have any close calls, any problems during those times doing that?

CP: No, not that I know of.

RV: Were you able to take any R&Rs (rest and recuperation)?

CP: No, not so as to say other than the week at Cam Ranh Bay and occasionally a day or two in Taiwan.

RV: How about USO (United Service Organization) shows? Were you able to attend any of those?

CP: Oh, yeah. I got to watch Bob Hope show one Christmas.

RV: Did you really?

CP: Fact is, I was the back up airplane to haul him around.
RV: What was that show? I’m sorry?
CP: But we didn’t.
RV: What was that show like?
CP: It was one of the biggies in Bien Hoa while I was there.
RV: Was it a good show?
CP: Oh, of course.
RV: A lot of soldiers there?
CP: You betcha, everybody that was anybody.
RV: Did you ever experience any race issues amongst the Americans?
CP: I never did get involved in any, no.
RV: You saw some happen though?
CP: No.
RV: Okay. So to your knowledge, there was no race problem?
CP: It wasn’t where I was.
RV: What did you think of your leadership, your immediate superiors and then the overall American leadership in Vietnam?
CP: Well, my leaders were okay and then overall leadership had their hands tied.
RV: What do you mean by that?
CP: I always felt that it was we never did do what we wanted to do. We did what we felt right was doing. It wasn’t ours. It was their Civil War and we let them fight it instead of getting in the middle of it.
RV: You think we should’ve let them fight it versus us getting in the middle of it?
CP: I think that’s what happened.
RV: Were you ever wounded when you were over there or anything happen to you?
CP: No.
RV: No sickness, disease, anything like that?
CP: No.
RV: What was the bravest action that you witnessed in Vietnam? Is there anything that stands out?
CP: That I witnessed?
RV: Yes, sir.
CP: No.
RV: Was there a humorous event that stands out in your mind?
CP: Yes.
RV: Can you tell me about that?
CP: Well, we were out playing around one time. We’d taken off out of Saigon
and we were going to up to Bien Hue or some, Bien Hoa or somewhere—I mean to Phu
Bai, Hue, whatever that place is up North.
RV: Hue?
CP: Yeah. We had a bunch of Vietnamese, just miscellaneous people. We shut
down one of the engines and didn’t say anything to them. We just kind of turned around
and headed back into base. After awhile, they got to talking and whispering amongst
themselves and looking out the window. They sounded like one of the air-conditioners
wasn’t working.
RV: They thought the air-conditioner was the engine?
CP: No, no. Those things are pilot air-conditioners. You don’t know that do you?
RV: I’m sorry, say that again.
CP: Those propellers out front of the airplane there, they’re pilot air-conditioners.
RV: Okay.
CP: When they quit turning, the pilots begin to sweat. Anyway, they shut one of
them down. People kind of worried about it. They got to whispering amongst themselves
and looking out the windows and then they sat down and started counting the rosary.
RV: Oh really? They thought they were going to crash?
CP: They thought it was imminent.
RV: Did you tell them anything, not to worry?
CP: Well, we tried to.
RV: Did they listen to you?
CP: Of course. They sat down and buckled up and shut for the rest of the trip.
RV: Is there anything else that happened humorous?
CP: Yes, there’s another time. We were up at Phu Bai—I mean, up at—I keep
saying those things wrong. Up at Hue they had an airplane that couldn’t get started. So
they backed ours up to it and turned it on and the windmill, the other one, finally got it
started. That was kind of fun. Otherwise, they would have to leave it there and get shot
at all day.

RV: Right. You mentioned something on your questionnaire about your
nametag.

CP: Yeah.

RV: What was that?

CP: Well, I was walking home from the club one night and this officer, I forget,
somebody stopped and says, “Soldier, don’t you have your name tag upside down?” I
said, “Yes sir, that’s—I mean, crew rest that’s so I can look down. If I forget who I am I
can look down and see who I am.” Saluted and walked on. He kind of snickered, went on
about his business and left it lay.

RV: Anything else?

CP: No.

RV: How do you think the C-130 performed over there? Was it a reliable piece
of equipment?

CP: For the most part, I had an excellent time with it. It went everywhere I
needed for it to go.

RV: Did you ever have any contact with the personnel from the other allied
countries, the South Koreans or the Australians, or New Zealanders?

CP: No. When we were in stationed, we were living in a hotel downtown and
they had their ROK (Republic of Korea) troops that were security guards, but that’s about
the only time I ran into them much.

RV: What was your impression of those guys?

CP: They seemed to be a little bit above average.

RV: Really, what gave you that impression?

CP: Just they’re demeanor, reputation more than anything else.

RV: Right, what was their reputation?

CP: They were the meanest and the badest of all the Asian troops.
RV: Did you hear stories of what they had done?
CP: That was the word that was out.
RV: How about the Americans? What was your impression of the American soldier?
CP: They did what they were told for the most part.
RV: What did you think of the media coverage of the war? This is one of these controversial things that it was the first kind of war that Americans could see on their television in their living rooms every night. What did you think of the coverage?
CP: I didn’t worry about it.
RV: Have you had an opinion since the war about how the media covered it?
CP: No.
RV: Okay. So, how long were you in at CCK?
CP: About eighteen months.
RV: Was this the culmination of your time in the Air Force? Did you get out after you left CCK?
CP: No. I went back to McGuire for another year.
RV: Back to McGuire, okay. How many missions would you estimate you did fly in to Vietnam?
CP: A bunch. I got like three or five air medals. It’s like thirty for each one.
RV: You said about 1500 hours in-country?
CP: Yes.
RV: Okay.
CP: Well, on the 130.
RV: Right.
CP: Majority of it was in-country.
RV: When you went back to McGuire, did people ask you about what it was like in Vietnam?
CP: No. Most of them had been there or were headed there.
RV: Did you feel a sense of relief coming out of the war zone or was it just no big deal to you?
CP: Just the same, it was going to happen eventually.
RV: I’m sorry?
CP: It was just the thing that was going to happen eventually.
RV: Okay. Did any American civilians ask you about your time in Vietnam?
CP: Very few.
RV: Why do you think that was?
CP: They didn’t care.
RV: You think that attitude has changed over the years or has it remained?
CP: No.
RV: I’m sorry?
CP: No.
RV: What did you think of the anti-war movement in the United States?
CP: It was just hilarious.
RV: How so?
CP: They weren’t getting anywhere, weren’t accomplishing anything.
RV: You think they were pretty ineffective?
CP: Oh, no. They got everybody’s attention.
RV: Did you ever witness one?
CP: No. We didn’t have that problem in Tennessee.
RV: Right. So, when did you actually leave Taiwan to come back to McGuire, what year?
CP: I was trying to figure that. It was probably end of ’71.
RV: So, you went over basically in—
CP: ’70 and ’71, kind of between. It was after Tet and before the end.
RV: Then back at McGuire, you were there ’71 and ’72, is that correct?
CP: Yes. We flew the same missions.
RV: You flew the same missions out of McGuire?
CP: Yes. We still went in-country at least once a month.
RV: Really? Did anything particularly stand out in your mind about that time, the last time you were flying in and out?
CP: No.
RV: Okay, same as before basically?
CP: Pretty much.
RV: Did you notice any—?
CP: There was slacking off a little bit at the end.
RV: There was some slacking off? That’s what I was going to ask you. Did you notice a change in anything that was happening?
CP: Yeah. Well, it was fewer and fewer flights in and out.
RV: What about the morale of the Americans? Did you notice any change?
CP: No.
RV: Did you keep up with what was happening with the war overall, kind of the progress of the war?
CP: No.
RV: Why not?
CP: It wasn’t my interest.
RV: Okay. The United States turned the war over to the Vietnamese kind of the time when you were flying in and out there out of McGuire, the Vietnamization Policy. Did you think that this was a good policy that they were capable of taking over the war themselves?
CP: I thought they were capable of it, yes.
RV: Did you? Why did you think that?
CP: I didn’t think anything of the other, didn’t have any other adverse thoughts.
RV: So, based on what you saw, you thought that they could handle the situation?
CP: Sure.
RV: What did you think when the United States withdrew in 1973?
CP: What do I think the United States went through?
RV: No. What do you think when they withdrew from Vietnam, when they pulled out of Vietnam completely in 1973, what were thoughts about that?
CP: In 1973, I thought it was sad the way they did it.
RV: Really?
CP: But other than that it was inevitable.
RV: Why do you think it was sad?
CP: Just the way they showed it.

RV: You mean on television?

CP: Yes.

RV: What did you think in 1975 when South Vietnam fell as a country?

CP: That’s what I was talking about.

RV: Oh, okay.

CP: Not when we withdrew in ’73, when the end was ’75.

RV: What were your feelings about that?

CP: Well, glad that it was over.

RV: Really?

CP: Sorry that my side lost.

RV: Right. So you think the Americans lost the war in general?

CP: They never did fight it. They couldn’t lose it.

RV: I’m sorry, say that again.

CP: What we were supporting lost.

RV: I’m sorry, say that again.

CP: I said they never did fight it, they couldn’t lose. I said the people they were supporting lost.

RV: Okay. Do you suffer any disabilities from your service in Vietnam?

CP: No.

RV: When you got out of the service after McGuire, right in 1972?

CP: Yes.

RV: Did you follow at all what was happening with American Foreign Policy and how we were dealing with the Vietnam War and the aftermath of the war?

CP: No more than just reading about it in the paper or listening to the news.

RV: Did you try to read about the war or have you read any books about the war?

CP: No. I watch the Chuck Norris movies on it every now and then.

RV: What do you think about those movies on Vietnam?

CP: Entertainment more than anything else.

RV: Do you think they’re accurate or not?
CP: None of the ones I’ve seen haven’t been either way. There’s not a documentary. The C-Troop or the Boys, what was the other one? There’s been a couple of them that were pretty good.

RV: What do you think about Vietnam today?

CP: I hope they make it.

RV: Do you think it’s right for the United States to have a relationship with them today?

CP: Inevitable.

RV: Why?

CP: *The Mouse that Roared*, picked a fight with the United States that’ll give him military reparations.

RV: I’m sorry, say that again.

CP: *The Mouse that Roared*, the movie where the little country picked a fight with the USA so they would get war reparations.

RV: Do you think that’s applicable to Vietnam in the United States?

CP: It’s always applicable after a war to take care of the people that were there.

RV: Do you think that’s a mistake the United States is making with Vietnam right now or do you think that’s happening right now?

CP: It’s not anymore of a mistake to give them money than it is to anybody else.

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

CP: No more than I would be anywhere else, just another place to visit.

RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in the United States since your time over there?

CP: Not much yet. I say that because there’s a bunch of them over here and there’s not much in my area.

RV: How do you feel about your service in Vietnam, looking back at it today?

CP: It was honorable.

RV: You think that’s the impression that the public has today of Vietnam veterans?

CP: Yes, more so now than when they were there.

RV: Why do you think that’s changed?
CP: Because they were soldiers. People don’t know what was going on or why they were there.

RV: Is there anything that you would change about your experience in Vietnam?
CP: Nope.

RV: What do you think was the most significant thing you learned while you were there?
CP: I’m not sure there’s an answer to that question. Mind your own business.

RV: I’m sorry?
CP: Mind your own business.

RV: Okay. You’re talking about in reference to the United States?
CP: No, me.

RV: You?
CP: Don’t get in anybody’s way and don’t volunteer for anything.

RV: I’m sorry?
CP: I say, now don’t get in anybody’s way and don’t volunteer for anything.

RV: How do you think the war’s most affected your life?
CP: Just one of those things that happened for four years.

RV: Do you think the United States learned any lessons from the Vietnam War?
CP: I hope so.

RV: What do you think they might’ve learned?
CP: Stay out of other people’s business.

RV: Anything else?
CP: Nope.

RV: If you had to talk to young people today about the war, what would you tell them?
CP: Tell them to stay out of it (inaudible).

RV: Stay out of war?
CP: Yes.

RV: What do you think about the present day situation with Iraq? Is this kind of similar to what happened in Vietnam do you think?
CP: Nope.
RV: How so?

CP: I don’t know. It’s something that our president of administration has a wild hair somewhere that they don’t need one. It’s going to happen sooner or later. I haven’t understood why.

RV: Do you think that they’re looking back at America’s experience in Vietnam and drawing lessons from that?

CP: No, different situation.

RV: I’m sorry?

CP: Different situation, different people, different time.

RV: Do you think the present and future U.S. governments can learn from Vietnam or is that too far in the past?

CP: Any of them can learn from anything, it just happens most of them won’t.

RV: Why do you think that?

CP: That’s the human way.

RV: That they don’t learn?

CP: You can’t learn from anybody else’s burnt finger. You have to burn your own.

RV: Have you ever been to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington?

CP: No, but I’ve seen the traveling unit.

RV: What was your experience with the Traveling Wall?

CP: It was just part of it.

RV: Did you have any friends on the Wall?

CP: Nope. My friends were never assigned there. They weren’t killed on duty.

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

CP: That ought to do it.

RV: All right, well, Mr. Pardue, I appreciate your time.

CP: I’m glad I could be part of it.

RV: Yes, sir. Thank you very much.

CP: Okay, bye.