Dennis Berger: This is Dennis Berger working for the Vietnam Archives at Texas Tech University, conducting an oral history interview with Mister Edward Fitzpatrick. Today is August 13, 2008. I am talking to Mr. Fitzpatrick from Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. Mr. Fitzpatrick is located in Paris, Kentucky. Okay. Mr. Fitzpatrick thank you for agreeing to come on with the interview today.

Edward Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

DB: Now I have a series of things I want to talk about. Let’s talk about your childhood first. When and where were you born?

EF: I was born in Bourbon County, Kentucky, May 16, 1935.

DB: Okay. And how would you describe your family’s status there, in Bourbon County?

EF: As mostly a single mother. My father divorced my mother and left at, when I was about six years old. So I was raised by my mother and my grandparents.

DB: Do you think they had a huge influence on your later outlook on life?

EF: Yeah, I just wanted to be sure that my family never had to suffer that--when I had a family.

DB: Okay, and what was your, sorry, what was your childhood like?

EF: I grew up as a farm boy. So my life was spent mostly on the farm. That was the case all the way up until I left and went into the service.

DB: Okay, what sort of crops did you grow on the farm?
EF: Tobacco, mainly, was the primary crop. Other than that it was just corn and hay.

DB: Okay, during your high school years, did you have any specific interests or things you went out for?

EF: I played football in junior high school, but not in high school.

DB: Any other type of activities?

EF: No. I can’t think of anything right now.

DB: Okay. Would you describe your home town, your high school as being a typical American town in the fifties?

EF: Yes it was. It was a small town. There was a probably in my graduating class there was only fifty-six of us, so it wasn’t a large, large community. I would say it ran somewhere around in the county, there was probably fifteen thousand people—in the county. And it was one of those type where everyone knew everyone. So we had a city school and we had a county school, and there was always, of course, the local competition, but yet everybody knew everyone.

DB: Was this the kind of environment that kind of contributed to kids wanting to go into the military, to contribute to the way of life Americans were living in that time period?

EF: Well, in that time period we were all expected to go into the military, because we knew as soon as we got out of high school that within a year or so we going to be drafted. So there was a lot of volunteers that went. I was a volunteer. I wanted to get it over with, but some waited around for the draft before they settled down and to you might say their career for life. They wanted to get the military behind them.

DB: But at this time period the draft wasn’t as hot and heavy as it would be ten years later, was it?

EF: Well, see the Korean War was still going on then and so there was still quite a few people, you know, getting drafted into the Korean War. It was winding [down] by the time that I entered the service but it was just standard. In those days nearly everybody had to serve their two years of, you know, military service. It was just expected as soon as you graduated from high school it wasn’t going to be long until you were drafted.
DB: Looking back, how do you feel about that expectation that everybody was going to serve?

EF: Well there was no regrets that I can think of. It was just something that was expected back in those days. It was almost like a requirement for a young man that he was going to serve his country.

DB: Do you think it was something that contributed to the, a, a better society, American society in that time period?

EF: Oh, most definitely. I think the worst thing the government ever did was stop the draft. Because it, it gives young people a focus. It gets them out on their own. It breaks them from dependence on their parents. And I think it’s the worst thing that ever happened, was when they stopped the draft.

DB: So, that’s great. Why did, you said you decided to enlist because just to get it over with before your draft number came up, inevitably. Why did you decide on the Navy?

EF: I often wonder about that. Since the Air Force was such a much better, much better service as far as I was concerned. The Navy, I guess I, I chose that because of its tradition, but I found out that, that wasn’t for me.

DB: Okay. Where did you go to boot camp for the Navy?

EF: A place called Bainbridge, Maryland.

DB: And where’s that, exactly—pretty close to?

EF: Let’s see. In fact I went up there, tried to find it here a few years ago and everybody I asked never heard of it before and they’d lived there all of their life. But it was, I think, it, the best I can find out it was about, approximately fifty miles from Baltimore, Maryland.

DB: Okay. What was a typical day in Navy boot camp like in the fifties?

EF: Very strict discipline. Constant harassment. I guess trying to weld you together as a unit. Usually you was awakened before daylight. You, you went to chow. You marched everyplace you went. Every class you marched. When the day finally ended there could be no dirty clothes. All your dirty clothes had to be washed everyday. You stood a white glove inspection. You would clean the old barracks floors with brick and sand. I guess out of that you had one week, I can remember, of KP duty—out of the
three months that we were in basic. We went through all the phases, I guess, that would
be involved with the Navy—from loading guns to, uh, up to a five inch thirty-eighths, to
firefighting oil fires inside of a makeshift ship, to learning semaphore, with flags. That’s
about all I can tell you.

DB: Pretty regimented. Was there a tearing down process where they stripped
you all of your civilian demeanor and then a point in time where they started building you
back up into being a sailor?

EF: Oh well I do know this that they took everything that was civilian when we
entered and shipped back to our homes. We lived in an old World War II barracks—two
hundred men to a company. We, we never had but one eight hour pass in three months. I
mean that’s, you know, literally getting off, off of a base. We were bused as a group to a
beach down in Baltimore somewhere. We were bused back. We were kept mostly in a
unit. Close knit unit. The only free time we ever had was, they would allow us to go to a
little BX sort of a place. You know, for a few hours on a weekend. That was about it.
Other than that we were twenty-four, seven as a group.

DB: Was there any particular kind of training, one specific type of training that
they emphasized over the others, because of the world conditions at that time?

EF: No, none that I can think of. There was no indoctrinations or anything like
that that I can remember.

DB: So, Navy basic at that time really wasn’t a reflection of the Cold War? It was
just a basic—

EF: Uh—

DB: --primer.

EF: No, you know, not, not in my mindset, it wasn’t. Of course, probably at that
particular time, as an eighteen year old, I wasn’t too knowledgeable what they was
talking about, Cold War and all.

DB: Was there any particular point in time where you woke up and said “What
am I doing here? What did I do?”

EF: That was, that was my first night on that Navy base. Yeah, I definitely
remember that, cause I had, I had been drawn in with a group of people who were of
different cultural background and age groups, and I was out of my, I was out of my
environment. So yeah, I can probably say that first week was probably like I said, “What in the world did I volunteer for?”

DB: What were your petty officers in training like?

EF: Hmm, almost typical of what you would see of a Marine drill sergeant. I had two, I had one chief petty officer and one first class petty officer. And so, I guess probably one of the, the best I can remember, probably the sticker with these people were cleanliness—above everything else. I can remember one particular time that we fell out for inspection and out of a two hundred man company there was only seven of us standing when it was over. So I’d say that was probably the thing they were the hardest on, was cleanliness. Not only of your uniforms, but of your living quarters, of how you folded your clothes. Nothing unusual for them to, for you to walk into the barracks after a hard day and see all of your clothes laying on the floor and walked on, because you had forgot to fold something a little different in your locker.

DB: Was discipline a pretty standard tool?

EF: Very standard.

DB: Almost punishment like, or just…

EF: Yeah, it was almost punishment. It was, it was punishment discipline. I can remember one young man who was, we trained with rifles, those [Model] 1903s, and I can remember one young man who was not holding his rifle right, marching, and first class petty officer made him hold it above his head and run around this grinder until he literally fell, with the rifle above his head. Yeah, I’d say discipline was very strong.

DB: Do you think that all this training really prepared you for, to get out into the fleet, or—

EF: Yes, I do. I look back on it, you know, and I think it was harsh then, but I look back on it and it was actually had two purposes. One was to take orders and the other was to work with groups, a group.

DB: Are there any specific memories you have of that Navy boot camp?

EF: Mmm, just the ones I spoke of there.

DB: Just the ones you spoke of.

EF: Uh-hmm.
DB: You know, what with the discipline and the spit shine attitude they had,
today they’re getting away from that in a lot of boot camps and basic trainings, looking
at, trying to survive, I guess, in the field. How do you feel about that?

EF: Well by being brought up in the, I the old corps, I wouldn’t want to say this
because I’m not in basic anymore, so, I, I do know that their basic trainings are very short
anymore, so their missing out on something, by cutting the program, you know the basic
training program. So, I wouldn’t want to comment on that since I’m not near a military
training base or anything.

DB: Well how was, how long was boot camp when you went through it?

EF: Three months long.

DB: And when did you graduate?

EF: It was the end of September, I think it was, last week of September,
something like that.

DB: And that was what year?

EF: That was back in fifty-three.

DB: Fifty-three, right. Okay, and did you have a follow on school?

EF: Yes, I had to go to a two month school in, there was a base outside of
Oklahoma City University, well University of Oklahoma, called Norman. That’s where
the university is and there was a base there at Norman. Which is, I went to visit here
about a few years ago, and there’s nothing but foundations left there now. I think the
University of Oklahoma owns the property. But it was a preparatory school in aviation,
and they would take you through all the phases of aviation to see which one you best
qualified for. And since the Navy, their aviation program is a lot different than the Air
Force program, of course they don’t have all the room for the people on board ships like
an Air Force base does, so the particular field that I was, I was chosen for was
electronics. And in those days if you were electronics that covered everything, including
navigation, radar, radio operator, the whole works. Where the Air Force had so many
different AFSCs that they had a man just for communication, one just for radar, one just
for ECM, you know, on down the line.

DB: Some folks may not know what those terms are. AFSC is Air Force Specialty
Code and ECM is electronic countermeasures, correct?
EF: Yes.

DB: So you were pretty much overall an avionics technician, then.

EF: Right. It covered everything.

DB: Okay. Do you think that was a, was that a good school you went through?

EF: Yes, it was. Yes, I went through the school at a, you mean that particular school?

DB: Right.

EF: Oh yes, yes. Because they gave you a real good background on, you know, engines, sheet metal work, gunneries, ordnance, electronics, electricians, so think there was only about seven fields at that time to cover the whole aviation field.

DB: Okay, when you left Norman where was your first duty station?

EF: Well, from there I left and then I went to my specialty school. I went to electronics school out of there.

DB: And where was that?

EF: That was in Millington, Tennessee, which is just north of Memphis.

DB: Is that close to NAS Memphis?

EF: That would be NAS Memphis.

DB: Okay. And what did you specialize there in Memphis?

EF: Aviation electronics.

DB: Specifically electronics? Okay. So at Norman you got a broad based approach to, to aviation maintenance and then when you got to Tennessee they refined you down into avionics.

EF: Right.

DB: Okay. After you left there where did you go?


DB: What type of aircraft did VF-194 fly?

EF: They were called AD-6s, then. Later on the designations were changed to AE, let’s see, what did the Air Force call that? Well, it was an AD-6. I forget right now. I’ll think of it in a few minutes what the Air Force called it. When, you know, when they changed designations in the late ‘sixties or late fifties, early sixties, the planes had the same designation in the Air Force and Marines that they had in the Navy. Like, for
instance, an R-4D in the Navy was called a C-47 in the Air Force. So they changed all the
designations.

DB: Okay. When did you decide to separate from the Navy?

EF: I got out of the Navy in, let’s see, fifty-seven. And I came back to my home
town and I looked for work in electronics and I was accepted by two different places.
One was Motorola in Indiana and another one Gentile Air Force Depot in Dayton, Ohio.
But, I just had military blood in me, I guess. So I decided to go back into the service
instead of going to one of these two jobs. And I chose the Air Force cause a friend of
mine had been in the Air Force, and he told me the difference in the way of life in there
and what I was used to.

DB: What did he tell you, exactly—if you remember?

EF: Well as we were talking about duty and all of this he was telling me how
much time he had off and I was telling him about guard duty I had to pull. And he was
telling me, well, the Air Force had its own police force and I was telling him how many
nights I had to spend on base with my wife living just off base and I couldn’t go home
and I had nothing to do a whole weekend, but lay around a barracks, because I was on
alert duty. And he told me he stayed home and on alert duty. I said, well, if I’m going to
be married and in the service, I want to spend some time with my wife. I think the first
two years that I was in the Navy I don’t think I had an overnight pass or, you know, a full
month where I had the weekends off. Cause I was on a duty, on duty assignment so
much. They had a thing called four section duty in the service, in the Navy. Which meant
you were on duty, off duty, on duty, off duty, and it broke down to so you was, you was
on or off, you know, Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. If you was off on a Wednesday of
one week you may be working the next Wednesday. If you was off this weekend you
might be working the next weekend. So I couldn’t take that. And I spent too much time
on duty.

DB: Did you meet your wife after you joined the Navy?

EF: Well actually I met her in high school. When we were in high school.

DB: How did she adapt to being a Navy wife?

EF: Oh, well, I guess alright, except for the idea that I was, I was gone so much.

You didn’t, I was on how many bases, how many times I’m going to try and think of it.
One, two, three, four, five, six bases in four years, in the Navy. So that moving wasn’t her ideal. Constant moving, and me on duty all the time. So it meant she had to make new friends, you know, that much moving, you don’t make ‘em, that long lasting friendships.

DB: Do you recall what was those bases were, those six bases?

EF: Well, let’s see, I was at Bainbridge, Maryland, I was at Norman, Oklahoma, I was in NAS Memphis, I was aboard the USS Wasp, I was at NAS Alameda, and I was at NAS Corpus Christi, Texas.

DB: Okay, when you were aboard the Wasp, where was she home based?

EF: I was in an air group aboard that Wasp, I can’t tell you where she was based because we were just assigned to that ship. I know we came back in after we left the, our tour of duty in the Pacific. We came back in to San Diego. We left out of Alameda, but we came back into San Diego. And then we flew from there up to our home base at Alameda.

DB: Can you think back, when you were in the Navy, how would you rate the professionalism of the enlisted force at that time.

EF: Excellent. Excellent. I’m amazed, and I still stand amazed, how they can take a young man, eighteen years old, and train him, and then turn him loose on million dollar airplanes, you know, at that time. Now they’re, million wouldn’t even buy the tires on ‘em now. But in those days, I’m just amazed how they would turn us loose to maintain those airplanes. And we did it efficiently.

DB: Do you think the draft, with its ability to bring people in from different cross sections of the country, in different social positions, had a big part of that?

EF: Course I, I don’t know what their selection requirements are now, for getting into the military, but I feel that the draft got the social skills, the mechanical skills, on a broader sense than they do now by just volunteers. Education wise, I don’t know what their requirements are for the enlistment now, but, yeah I believed that the draft created a much more broader and cross section of people and skills than it does this way.

DB: Let me get back on that, because the way the enlisted force is structured in that time period. How would you describe officer-enlisted relations, in the Navy itself.

EF: There was a very defined line between naval officers and enlisted.
DB: So, for instance, if you were aboard ship, you would never wander into
officer country?
EF: Never. There was a, a very little communications between, of course, when
you get up to a chief petty officer and all, it was different, because they ruled the enlisted,
but it was handed down by the officers. That’s another reason that I enjoyed the Air
Force, because there wasn’t that defined line, you know. You had your officer control,
but there wasn’t that separation.
DB: I remember when I first went to a Navy, I was stationed a Navy base and
going into the galley and there was an area set aside for chiefs only.
EF: Yep.
EF: And in the Air Force I was, you were taught that we ate with the troops and I
thought that’s an awfully odd separation, but I could see a little bit, but at the same time I
didn’t have to like it.
EF: (Laughing) Yeah, they were, they were that go between between the officers
and the enlisted, the chief was. So you didn’t get to the officer side of the line because
you had the chief line to go through first. (Laughing)
DB: Yeah. What were race relations like in your time in the Navy?
EF: Repeat that again, please.
DB: What were race relations like?
EF: You know there was only one black boy in my whole company in, in the
Navy. And we gave him a hard time, but I mean there was no derogatory part of it. In fact
I can’t, to be honest with you, I can’t remember that many blacks in my outfit in the
Navy.
DB: This was only a few years after President Truman had integrated the military
EF: Right. This was before that, see.
DB: What about substance abuse? Was there an issue when you were in?
EF: You know, I only can remember one incidence in the Navy, and that was a
boy that went into a, we, we don’t know, we thought he was having an epileptic fit, you
know. Cause none of us knew what dope was or, or any kind of a narcotics or, to, to the
people in my, let’s go back here this sort of equates to the people I was in the service
with. When I was growing up back in here in high school, dope was something that was
foreign and poison. It happened in Chicago, and New York, and places like that. I don’t
ever remember anyone taking illegal drugs, except this one fellow that was from
California and it happened there in Alameda, California, before I transferred to Texas,
and we had to call the ambulance on him and come to find out he was taking some kind
of drugs.

DB: And obviously alcohol had a different mindset.

EF: Yeah, yeah now there, there you had a, course when you get you get guys at
sea for two and three weeks at a time, when they hit port they get a little bit inebriated.

DB: Was there ever a problem on board ship, people sneaking alcohol on board?
EF: They tried to get it aboard, but they’d usually get caught there at the gang
plank, getting on board. So never, never, I never say anybody with any on board or I
never saw anybody drunk on board.

DB: What was your—

EF: I saw one guy try to get on board with a, a bottle in Yokosuka, Japan, and he
had in a shoe box, so he kept telling ‘em it was just a pair of shoes. They opened it up and
it was a bottle, so they threw it overboard. That little old boy was so drunk he jumped
overboard trying to get his bottle and they had to send a boat to get him. But they’d
usually catch you before you got on board with anything.

DB: Okay. What was your rank when you got out of the Navy?
EF: I was an AT3.

DB: AT3, okay. And when you joined the Air Force did you keep that same pay
grade—

EF: No. No. I lost it. It was almost like starting over again.

DB: Do you think that was worth it?
EF: As I look at it now, it was. When I, the first few years I didn’t think it was
worth it. But after I look back, and being retired now for thirty-five years, yeah, I think
it’s worth it.

DB: Okay, I know [in] the Navy, well in the Air Force too, in lower enlisted ranks
promote fairly quickly on a, on a time table. What was it like in this time period, both of
them?

EF: Repeat that again.
DB: I know today they, you make E-2 in a certain time period and E-3 in a certain
time period—and E-4. What was it like, was it the same thing then, or was, did
promotions come fairly regularly, quickly, or slowly.
EF: In the Navy?
DB: Both of them in that time period.
EF: The Air Force it did. Navy, Navy didn’t. But I do know that as soon as I got
into the Air Force I mean, everybody had been in there four, four years, five years was a
staff sergeant. But then, bingo, they froze it, right after I got in there.
DB: It was part of that Korean Hump?
EF: Yeah. I mean tell you it, I, I saw guys retire as staff sergeant that had been a
staff sergeant for fifteen years, when I got in the Air Force.
DB: Well, how did that affect folks’ morale?
EF: Well, I do know a lot of ‘em that got out and didn’t stay because of that.
DB: So when you came back in the Air Force, what did you come in as?
EF: Airman second.
DB: Airman second, which would have been an E-3—
EF: What’s that an E—.
DB: Two stripes?
EF: Yeah.
DB: That would have been an E-3.
EF: E-3.
DB: Okay, and what was your specialty once you got into the Air Force?
EF: Then they just made me, it was called 30150, which was radio.
DB: Radio?
EF: Yeah.
DB: Straight radio, or was it, was it comm/nav?
EF: No, it was just radio.
DB: Okay. Tell me—
EF: We were, we were in the, when you hear that that’s comm/nav, you know,
comm./nav was always grouped together, but you still had 30150s, 30151s, or seven-ohs,
and seven-ones, and seven-threes, and keep on going. It was all considered in that same,
you know, comm/nav field, but each one of you had your specialty.

DB: Okay. With your advanced Navy training did you have to go back to any Air
Force technical schools?

EF: No, just, just when new products came out, you know, with the different type
planes. When newer equipment would come out we’d have to go back to school, but
when I was on, when I worked flight lines I, I worked it all because I was already trained.
So even though I was a radioman I still worked on the radar, and the navigation
equipment, just as if it was, you know, part of my field.

DB: Do you feel you had a little more autonomy as an Air Force maintainer than a
Navy maintainer, or was it pretty much the same, as far as the level of responsibility you
were granted?

EF: I think I probably had more responsibility in the Air Force than I did in the
Navy.

DB: What was your first duty station once you got in the Air Force?

EF: Langley.

DB: Okay.

EF: Langley Field, Virginia.

DB: That was the 1st Fighter Wing in those days, also?

EF: I was with the 405th Fighter Bomber Wing.

DB: Okay.

EF: F-100s.

DB: F-100s. What’s your impression of that airplane?

EF: F-100?

DB: Right.

EF: At that time it was one of the hottest things out. It was, you know, it was a top
of the line fighter. One of those sound breakers, you know, break the sound barrier. It was
a fabulous plane.

DB: You were in TAC (Tactical Air Command) in those days then—

EF: Right. That was TAC.
DB: Was TAC in those days trying to push for a nuclear mission, for a lot of its fighter-bombers?
EF: Uh—
DB: To try and compete with SAC (Strategic Air Command) a little bit, as far as trying to get the nuclear role.
EF: I’m sorry.
DB: Was TAC trying to compete with SAC a little bit in those days? Against SAC for a nuclear role?
EF: Uh—
DB: For its fighters?
EF: Not, not that I know of.
DB: You talked a little about how, what Navy life was like. As an E-3 coming into the Air Force in that time period, what was it like in comparison between the two?
EF: Like going to a civilian job.
DB: Okay. That said, how was, how was the level of professionalism of the Air Force then?
EF: I think it was equivalent to the Navy. You had your people that was trained in their specific fields, and they were good at it, in that specific field. They may not, you know, they may not be able to work on, if you were a comm man then you might not have been able to go to the bench and start working on a piece of radar equipment. But I would say in the field, in the field they were in, they were just as qualified as, you know, or professional as the Navy.
DB: After you left Langley, where did you end up?
EF: Well, I had to go TDY (Temporary Duty) once. If you’re minded of TDYs, they’re 179 days, right?
DB: Right. No, no short tours.
EF: Well, I just happened to go into this Ranch Hand outfit. And we were gone from November until June, which meant that we were gone more than 180 days. Which means we were moving around the world without orders, on our own, almost. But I went from Langley to Vietnam.
DB: Okay. Let’s step back a little bit. How, how and when did this Ranch Hand operation get formed?

EF: Langley, Langley had a C-47 outfit that was, had a spraying mechanism on, used to spray for mosquitoes, and they were, you know, they had been used to flying low level missions, and all, to spray for mosquitoes, and somewhere along the line in, just prior to November, no, what was it? I’m going to take a guess here, about the middle of November, this is how I got involved in it. I was called to wing headquarters on a Sunday afternoon and they wanted to know if I would be willing to volunteer to go on a, on a secret mission. They couldn’t tell me where I was going and I says, “well, how long am I gonna be gone?” They says, oh, “probably two or three months.” In that particular time we were short handed at the base I was on, at Langley, and I was working day and night, and I says “I’ll take it.” And so I said “When do we leave?” They say “Oh, about January or February.” This was November, and then the day before Thanksgiving they notified us we was leaving on a Friday.

DB: What year was that?

EF: That was in November of 1961.

DB: Okay. And you left, what type of aircraft was it? Was it the C-47?

EF: No. No, we, we joined up with the rest of the squadron at Pope Air Force Base, Fayetteville, North Carolina. And we joined up with people from, shoot, I don’t know how many different bases. We just formed a squadron, there at, at Pope. And they came from Seymour Johnson, Pope, England Air Force Base, Langley, I don’t know how many. I think there was some from Shaw, it was several bases that, and I believe there was about seventy, approximately, seventy of us, something like that. And so when we got down there, the first couple of days we worked round the clock putting armor plating under the seats in all of these C-123s. We had six of them. And so we took off. There was six C-123s and I think there was three C-124s as support planes. And so we left from there and went to Travis. And then from there we went to Hickam and stayed a few days, and then from there to Guam, no Midway, to Guam. Guam to Clark Field, Philippines. And we stayed at Clark, gee whiz, it was probably January before we got to Vietnam. I remember we had to fly out of Clark and go up to Okinawa, because there was a
hurricane or something coming through, so we had to fly up there and then come back to
Clark. Then we got, got into, do you need exact dates?
DB: As close as you can.
EF: Well, wait a minute. I can give you exact dates.
DB: Okay.
EF: Let’s see. Yeah, we stayed two days at Hickam. Then went to Wake, and
Guam, and Clark, and then we went to Kadena. We got there, we got at Clark on the 6th
of December in sixty-one, and we had to fly up to Kadena on the 9th and we stayed up
there two days and got back on the 11th of December to Clark. So we didn’t get into
Saigon until the 8th of January. Now we didn’t take all the planes with us. I think we only
took either three or four planes with us and we left the rest of them and part of the crew at
Clark. And, so that, that, takes you up to when we got there. Any questions?
DB: You went into Saigon, Tan Son Knut?
EF: Yes.
DB: Okay.
EF: We got there on, let’s see, we got there on the 8th of January.
DB: Was there any specific unit designation once you guys got in-country? A
squadron number or anything?
EF: Well, they just called us Ranch Hands.
DB: And, did you fly—
EF: We went over there under, we went over there under a Operation Farm Gate.
But now, there was a, our part of it was called Ranch Hand and I can remember there was
another C-123 outfit that came over later that was called Mule Train, I think they called
them. But they weren’t involved in spraying, Agent Orange.
DB: Did the mission of your unit there, Ranch Hand, was to spray herbicides in
the jungle?
EF: Yes.
DB: The airplanes, how did they react to the climate in Vietnam?
EF: The 123s?
EF: They, they was fine aircraft. Take an old twin engine airplane and fly it across that Pacific, you know, they were good airplanes.

DB: Were there any specific problems with the any of the systems because of the humidity, or—

EF: No. No they just, they just flew and flew and flew. We had primitive maintenance and, thank the Lord that they were good airplanes, because, you know, we didn’t have all the equipment that you would need, like at a main base or anything, so we had to do it all with what we had.

DB: Well how did maintenance operate when y’all were there? Operate as a team, crew chiefs with specialists helping them, or—

EF: We worked, we worked as a team. Cause I was a, I was, I was the comm/nav man then, instead of a comm man. I was the comm/nav man, and so I had, I had electricians helping men and I helped the electricians. I helped instrument people and they helped me. So we, we sort of all worked as a team.

DB: Typically what was a day like once you get, they got a frag order to fly somewhere? How did you guys operate?

EF: Mm, oh, well we would usually walk, you know, we lived in a tent city there and we could walk from where we were up to, our planes were parked inside the presidential parking area—the president of South Vietnam’s parking area. It was a fenced in area. So that’s where we kept our planes, and, that first group over, we really didn’t fly, you know, what you might call, you know, every day spray missions, cause this was experimental. We, you know, we weren’t supposed to be there. And so it was a, it was a go out and practice or go out and make a spray run on a certain area, wait for the results, and it was, it was sort of a laid back outfit. Sometimes we’d switch from, from spraying and they may need some cargo or something taken up to, you know, some other base. We’d fly, maybe some cargo up there.

DB: On these early days, where were they doing most of their spraying? Any particular area, or is it like you said, it was just experimental?

EF: I can’t comment too much on that since I was ground crew.

DB: So crews didn’t talk a lot about what they were doing?

EF: No.
DB: Being an initial operation, one that was kind of, I guess, basically setting the
parameters for everything, setting the parameters for anybody to follow, how was the
morale and everything that you guys experienced at this time period?

EF: Oh, man. I can, I can only remember two outfits while I was in the service
that I can, you know, say I was proud to be a part of, and this Ranch Hand outfit and 76th
Air Rescue out of Hickam, that’s the only two outfits that I can really say of my twenty
years in the military that I still keep in contact with people.

DB: Well what was it about Ranch Hand that made it so special?

EF: Well I guess we were unique. Like I said, I don’t think there’s anybody that’s
got a set of orders with everybody’s name on it. Because we all came from different
bases to form this one squadron and when we departed, we departed when it was over,
but years later we joined up again as a reunion and that reunion’s been going on for, good
gracious, I’ve been going for twenty-five years. So, it was just, it was just something
unique. It was, it was not standard, okay. Lot of times, you know, at a regular base I
know you’d have to, you’d have to keep records and all of that, while lot of time we
worked on our planes, didn’t keep any records. There was a, there was a close knit
between officers and enlisted. You sort of just did your own thing, but when I say you did
your own thing, you made sure the job was right, but you did it your way.

DB: You say you lived in a tent city over there.

EF: Yeah.

DB: What kind of support did they have for you?

EF: Well, they had a, they had a, a chow hall set up in a hangar area for us.

Course we had a field kitchen where, you know, you had to eat out of your mess kits and
all. Our shower was set up with a big old water tank that heated up, the sun heated the
water in the day time, so you wanted to be sure you got there early to get a shower, cause
then they’d pump cold water in it. You had a, just a latrine up there in the tent city. There
was gravel road running up along in front of the tents, and that was just about the
facilities.

DB: Were those facilities for the entire base or just for your particular unit?

EF: Well, you might say, that entire base was us there for a while.

DB: What was Tan Son Nhut like in sixty-two?
EF: Oh, it was a beautiful city. You know you could get taxi cabs go down at nice restaurants. Nice hotels. It was just a beautiful, French-like city. You could drive through areas where it had that French décor to it because the French had a lot of influence over there at that time. In fact, you know, you heard more about Indochina than you did Vietnam, at that particular time.

DB: So the stressors you would see later on in Saigon weren’t there when you first arrived? As far as stresses from the war and the huge influx of GIs coming in.

EF: No, because see when we got there, I think we were considered what you’d call the first five thousand in, and there was only about, I’m going to take a guess, there was only about forty of us at Tan Son Knut at that time. Now, there was an Army company that was there later, and then there was also, little later, another few men coming in another C-123 outfit, but they probably weren’t any larger than we were. And then I think up at Bien Hoa, which was just north of there, there was a B-26 outfit, that was flying those Blackbirds. They had about a hundred and thirty something men in it. And then the rest of the bases, there wasn’t much more than seven or eight Air Force at any of those other bases that we ever went into.

DB: Okay. You said you up armored the airplanes at Langley. Did they have any battle damage when you were there?

EF: Uh—

DB: Ground fire, or anything?

EF: At Saigon?

DB: Yes.

EF: The first time we went over?

DB: Right.

EF: No. We lost two planes while I was over there, but we lost, we don’t know what happened to one of them. It went out with a flight of three, and she just went in. So we don’t know what happened to it. Then we lost another one up at Phu Bai, up near Hue, but they landed at the wrong spot and when they tried to take off, it was an old helicopter pad up there, and then when they tried to take off their nose gear caught some dirt at the end of the pad and she nosed in. So, but that’s, we didn’t have any battle damage unless it happened with the one that went in.
DB: What about fruit bats? I’ve read that they were a serious problem for the airplanes at their altitudes.

EF: Uhh—

DB: Those huge bats that flew around.

EF: No. I can’t comment on that because I didn’t fly but three or four times there.

DB: What was that like when you flew?

EF: I was out on a training mission once and we were just making low level flights over villages and rivers and it was just strictly a training flight. The next time we went to strip an airplane up at Phu Bai, which was about two and half, three hours away. We flew up there, and then we trucked into the plane, and stripped it and came back. We had to get out of there before dark, cause we was up near, you know, the DMZ area up there.

DB: I know you grew up in a heavily wooded part of the country and then being in Virginia before you went over there, but how did the jungle, what kind of impression did it make on you when you got there?

EF: Well that was a, sure was a lot of trees down there. Especially when, you know, you’re flying almost the length of the country.

DB: I’ve read so much about guys getting off of the airplane their first time there and the doors of the airplane open up and the smell overwhelms them. Was this an issue in sixty-two?

EF: No, we didn’t notice it.

DB: So your unit was in Saigon until what period in 1962 when you left?

EF: Well, let’s see. When we left, some of us, some of us came back by the Pacific, but I was with a group that had one plane and one C-124 and we went to, let’s see, we went to Tehran, Iran, and I think, let’s see, when did we get there? Trying to think, I’ll look see when we left. We left Saigon on the 13th day of May sixty-one. Flew from there to Bangkok; Calcutta, India; Karachi, Pakistan; got into Tehran, Iran on the 15th day of May. And our purpose for going there was they were having a locust problem. So they were going to send us there to spray for locusts. And then our outfit got another call, our squadron got another call to go to Kandahar, Afghanistan, and spray for locusts there. And we stayed in Tehran and then the embassy didn’t like a bunch of GIs living off
downtown Tehran in a hotel and they told us we was going to have to leave. So they diverted a plane out of Scotland to it come down to Tehran to pick us up and they flew us out of Tehran back to Kandahar on the 29th of May and then when we got there our squadron commander at that time said “What are y’all doing here?” You know, we said they told us to get out of Tehran. So, I think there was ten to twelve of us in maintenance and we had one master sergeant, that was the highest rank we had. And he said well, he asked that C-124 pilot to stay there overnight because he thought he was leaving the next day and the C-124 pilot said he couldn’t leave his plane sitting there overnight, he had to leave. So the next morning, our one C-123 took off and headed home. Well that left us in Kandahar, Afghanistan, with nothing. And finally, the USAID people over there went through the State Department someway, up through the ambassador at Kabul and then from there to the State Department. State Department through the Air Force down to air evac, telling air evac that they had, you know, litter patients in Kandahar, Afghanistan, to go get them out of Charleston, South Carolina. So on the 9th day of June an air evac Super Connie flew in there and picked us up. We left some of our equipment sitting there in the desert cause we couldn’t get it in that Super Connie and then we headed from there back to home through Saudi Arabia; Wheelus in Libya; Azores; Bermuda; and Charleston; Pope; and then back into Langley. Finally on the 14th day of June I got, I finally got home.

DB: And that was the 14th of June 1962?

EF: Uh-hmm.

DB: When you got back to Langley, what did you do?

EF: Well first I had to get assigned because I no longer belonged to my outfit, because I’d been gone so long. So I had to go up and talk to the squadron commander and of course I had known him for years, and so, he said, well, we’ll get you reinstated cause you belong here, even though you’re not on our records anymore. They thought we’d all been, he said he thought we’d all been killed. So, he gave me two weeks vacation to go home, so I went home and picked up my wife and came back.

DB: Did your wife know what was going on the whole time you were with Ranch Hand?
EF: No. In fact she didn’t even know where I was until, up, probably, February.
When I left in November she didn’t know where I was. I could write to her, I just
couldn’t tell her where I was. But she found out on the news where I was.

DB: Wives have a way of doing those kind of things when it’s a secret. So, you
come back to Langley, you got reinstated into your old squadron. Did they still have F-
100s, or did they transition—
EF: Oh, no. In fact I wasn’t in the F-100s during this period of time that, that,
when I went… I only stayed, I only stayed in the one hundreds probably less than a year,
and then I went over to base operations.

DB: Okay, what did you do at base ops?
EF: Mostly taking care of transient aircraft, and all of this, we, we duckbutted a
lot of planes to Europe during that time. During, I guess that’s the Cold War period? And
what they’d do, they’d fly them into Langley and we’d set them up, make sure that all
their communications were working, set up all new frequencies, and then we had some
KB-50 tanker planes that would duckbutt these people to Europe. They’d refuel them in
the air. So, but our job was getting these planes ready to go to Europe.

DB: So were you assigned to Transient Alert?
EF: Yeah.

DB: After that what did you do?
EF: Then I moved over to the maintenance organization there and I worked on
the radio equipment in that outfit.

DB: Was that in Avionics Maintenance Squadron?
EF: Right.

DB: What wing was that when you were there? Was that the 1st Fighter Wing?
EF: Goodness gracious. You mean the base itself?
DB: The base itself, yes.
EF: Oh, Lord. We had, Langley at that time had planes from one of the field to the
other. There was the 405th Fighter-Bomber Wing, had four squadrons of F-100s. There
was, I don’t know how many squadrons of B-57s. There was two squadrons of KB-50s.
There was a fighter-interceptor squadron there. Air Defense Command was there, a
squadron. And then base ops probably had fifty or sixty airplanes of its own, since it was TAC headquarters.

DB: Okay, from there what did you do?
EF: Then I was transferred from there to, in, let’s see, I guess that was in about July, July of sixty-four. I went to Hickam Air Force Base.

DB: And your unit there was a rescue unit?
EF: I was with the 76th Air Rescue Squadron.
DB: What aircraft did they have then?
EF: When I got there we had C-54s. We only had four. And during the three years I was there we went to C-97, HC-97s. We had twelve. And then the last year I was there we had new HC-130Hs. We had I believe six.

DB: And you said it was a rescue unit, what was their, how’d they use their aircraft, in the mission?
EF: Well, two purposes. One, was at that time that’s when all of these Gemini shots were going up, where, you know, the astronauts would come back in the capsule and land out in the sea? And then a ship would pick ‘em up? What our primary job then was, was for flying support for those Geminis in case one of them happened to land off course, or something, we would have rescue planes stationed all over the Pacific, and pararescuemen, they’d go out and bail out over those capsules and put floatations on ‘em and keep ‘em afloat until a ship could arrive. That was a primary. And then of course our secondary was flying support for all those fighters that was going into Vietnam during that time, out of the States. And then for eighteen months we had to go over and support a SA-16 outfit. Rescue out of Clark Field, Philippines, cause they couldn’t keep their old sea planes flying. So we kept those HC-97s at about six weeks, anywhere from a month to six weeks intervals over there at Clark supporting them. Then come back and another crew would go over.

DB: Okay. Are there any specific memories for your time in rescue?
EF: Yeah. The time we got lost over the Pacific.
DB: That’s not hard to do, is it?
EF: Well, we were, we were in the Philippines and they had moved all the planes down out of Okinawa cause, here we go, remember I told you in sixty-two we went to
Okinawa cause of a typhoon, well the Okini had to fly theirs down to Clark Field on account of a typhoon and we had one of our planes go out one day and come in at night and the base was just packed with airplanes and so he was taxiing in and his wingtip clipped the top of a SA-16 and knocked the compass out. So we were coming home in the next day or two. They didn’t have a compass at Clark for our plane, so we thought we could get one out of Japan. So we flew the islands up to Japan, got up there and still no compass. And so, I remember they were saying, well, our aircraft commander asked the navigator “We got a clear sky across this Pacific tonight,” says “you can navigate by the stars, can’t you?” He said “Why sure I can.” So we headed across the Pacific with our navigator who should have been, you know, should have been a good navigator, but electronics I guess took him away his primary job shooting stars. We got out there and one time we got off the, at that time they had ocean stations, out in the Pacific. They were ships that were navigational aids. They’d stay out so many months and come back, another ship would go out and so they kept planes on track as far as a checkpoint. So they got us back on course once and we were, we were heading to Midway I think. I can remember, I remember our squadron commander, I mean our aircraft commander, asking the navigator said “Shouldn’t we be at Midway now?” He said, “Well, yeah. We should have been there forty-five minutes ago.” I kept noticing him jumping, boy, just running up into that bubble, checking those stars, you know, and down checking LORAN and all of that. We were lost bigger than life out there and all at once we heard an SOS, “Mayday, mayday.” There was a C-133 flying out of Japan for Midway and he was behind us and I remember he said he had lost one engine and another prop was going and he had dumped twenty thousand pounds of cargo and he was still losing altitude. And so, I’ll never forget that cool aircraft commander, you know, he said well “Air Force so and so, this is Rescue so and so” said “we’ll see if we can’t locate you.” So he put it in a three hundred and sixty degree turn and right out on the very edge of the radar we picked up this C-133. And so we turned and we went back, fell in behind this 133, and he told this aircraft commander on this 133, said “we are about a mile behind you and a thousand feet below you” says “we’ll escort you on into Midway.” And that was our life saver. He escorted us into Midway. Needless to say that navigator, about two weeks later, believe it
or not, got caught stealing whiskey in Honolulu and they kicked him out of the service.

So that was my one memory of that air rescue squadron.

DB: After you left rescue what did you end up doing?

EF: Then I was sent back to Luke Air Force Base in Arizona and I was with the F-100s again. And Luke Air Force Base was a training base for Southeast Asia. In fact he says (squadron commander), at our first commander’s call was “gentlemen you will be here one year and you’ll go to Southeast Asia.” So, I got my orders in one year, to go to Southeast Asia. And I don’t know of anybody that left that base other than those that retired that went anyplace other than Southeast Asia.

DB: It’s your second tour in Vietnam. When did you get there for the second time?

EF: Well, I didn’t get there until, it was April of sixty, what was that, sixty-nine. Because they couldn’t get me into school. I had to go to school before I went there, and so I actually was, took me almost eighteen months to get there, cause they couldn’t get me into school in Texas and I had to have that school before I went.

DB: What school would that have been?

EF: It was “seek silence.” (Seek silence was a tactical communication system used in air to ground communication by forward air controllers)

DB: So you went school. How did you get back into Vietnam from there?

EF: Well after I finished my school, then I, then I went to Vietnam from there.

DB: Okay.

EF: I went back to Bien Hoa.

DB: Bien Hoa, okay. And what unit were you assigned to in Bien Hoa?

EF: I was with 19th TASS. (Tactical Air Support Squadron)

DB: TASS stands for—

EF: TASS. That’s forward air controllers.

DB: And what airplanes did they fly then?

EF: O-1s, O-2s, and OV-10s.

DB: Was that a big change for you to go to something smaller after being on 123s for so long?
EF: Yeah, it was. Yeah, because I worked on big planes most of the time, you know, even though I was on fighters and smaller ones before, but this was, this was definitely a big change. To say working on transient alert on a C-124 or a C-133 and then go to work on a grasshopper.

DB: I know that the O-1 is basically a militarized version of a, of a Cessna. How did it adapt to the weather over there, to the flying conditions?

EF: Oh, it had, it, I guess it did okay, it’s just that it had antique equipment on it. You know, it still had the old Army equipment on it that they used in Korea. We’d never been to school on it or anything and we had to go in and try to work on something we knew nothing about, but it would fly in anything.

DB: Comparing your two tours, the daily pace, how would you compare the two, between sixty-two and sixty-nine?

EF: It was, it was laid back the first tour and it was twenty-four, seven on the second tour.

DB: Had the attitude toward the Vietnamese changed, or because of the—

EF: Yeah. I saw a big change. Of course I was a barracks chief there then and I had to, I was constantly having problems with some of the people, with some of the Vietnamese help there, and it was not their fault; it was the GIs’ fault.

DB: Obviously this was a year after everything had kind of exploded back in the States in sixty-eight. How were these new troops reacting to being in-country? You said there were discipline problems.

EF: There was discipline problems over there that second time around.

DB: Okay, substance abuse?

EF: Substance alcohol, alcohol abuse.

DB: What about the racial climate? Obviously this was after everything had happened—

EF: About what sir?

DB: The racial climate. Had that changed drastically over the years? I mean after Martin Luther King was assassinated and everything else happened in sixty-eight?

EF: Well, there was a little division there, and in fact that was where I had most problems, in the barracks, was, you know, between them and the Vietnamese. Now I
don’t know why it was, it wasn’t against the GIs, GI and GI, but it was those with the Vietnamese.

DB: That’s interesting. Had the relations between officer/enlisted, aircrew/ground support changed between your two tours?

EF: Well, I don’t think so, I don’t think so, but I wasn’t as involved, but, in that, you know, in that officer/enlisted as much the second time as I was the first time. When I was there the second time I was in charge of night maintenance for electronics and I very seldom ever saw an officer. The only time I saw an officer is if I had a major problem that I would have to go talk to the pilot about, you now, and try to solve the problem. Because I just never saw, hardly saw an officer on nights.

DB: Well what rank were you—

EF: Tech sergeant.

DB: Tech sergeant, okay. Looking back on how sleepy, for lack of a better term, sleepy Tan Son Knut was in sixty-two, what was Bien Hoa like in sixty-nine? Was it crowded, busy, noisy?

EF: Repeat it again.

DB: Well sixty-two at Tan Son Knut you said was pretty laid back. You get to Bien Hoa in sixty-nine—

EF: Yeah.

DB:--was it just, how much difference was there between the two?

EF: Oh, Lord, much. We didn’t get much sleep. I didn’t get much sleep in Vietnam, to be honest with you, especially night time. I had to sleep mostly in the days. In the days it was a hustle bustle, but you learned to sleep. In Saigon, I mean it was like, that first time, it was just peaceful as it can be. So, it’s almost like the difference between daylight and dark.

DB: Did you get to get off base much, this tour?

EF: At Bien Hoa?

DB: Yes.

EF: Never was off base.

DB: Did you notice a definite change in the attitude of the Vietnamese you interacted with?
EF: No, I didn’t because I was, I guess I was on a more or less personal, you know, one on one with the people that worked there in the barracks. Since I was barracks chief, I was the one that had to solve the problems and so I had a good relation with those myself.

DB: Were young airmen, by this time, starting to get more involved with drugs than earlier years?

EF: Yes. In, in fact, I guess I really got involved myself when I was stationed in Arizona, because I was brought into, you know, a room and introduced to the smell of marijuana and the different powders, and all of that, for me to be aware of. I’d never even smelled marijuana until I got to Arizona and they was burning some in a room there so we could get used to what it smelled like. So yeah, I’d say that somewhere, somewhere between sixty-two and sixty-nine there was a great increase.

DB: Was there open use? I mean, you walk through the barracks and—

EF: No, no. If it was it was outside.

DB: So you didn’t walk through and have it roll underneath the doors, or whatever, into the hallway?

EF: Well, we didn’t have such accommodations over there. Our, our, our barracks consisted of like a World War II barracks, but instead of walls it had screens, you know. So the air could blow through.

DB: That brings up a good question about support facilities between Tan Son Knut in sixty-two and Bien Hoa in sixty-nine.

EF: Aw, it was like a regular base, it was like a stateside base when I got there in sixty-nine. It had all facilities.

DB: Any chance for R&R while you were there?

EF: I did have, but I refused it, because, see I had a short tour the second time. I was only over there about eight months the second time, because I had that time spent there in sixty-two. And so I had an opportunity to go to Australia, but it was like two weeks before I was scheduled to come back to the States. So I didn’t take it.

DB: In sixty-nine, what was a typical day like for you?

EF: Sixty-nine, okay. I’d usually get up about nine in the morning and we would go and get lunch about twelve. I’d just fool around and read or write until about three-
thirty in the afternoon. I’d go to work at three-thirty in the afternoon. I’d get off at
midnight. We would usually play cards until about two or three in the morning, because
Charley would usually shell us about anywhere after midnight, and anywhere between,
I’d say usually around one to three o’clock, somewhere right in there was when they’d
start shelling us. So we would just stay up and play cards until he got through with his
little game and then we’d go to sleep. That went on six days a week. My day off was on
Saturday. And I had a twenty-four break there on Saturday, which felt awful good.

DB: So you basically worked an eight hour shift while you were there? Was it
seven days a week or did you have extra time off?

EF: Like I said I had a Saturday off, on time. And of course when I say, course
these hours vary, you know, because sometime we wouldn’t get in til three o’clock in the
morning either cause that was according to how many planes was shot up and how much
work we had to do.

DB: So, basically when your shift came in, take care of battle damage, get ready
for the morning goes, and that sort of thing?

EF: Yeah. Mine was to, cause they’d be, they would, see what happened is we, we
had these, we had all these planes that was outside of Bien Hoa. They would be at an
Army base somewhere, or little, stationed out here with some Green Beret outfit, or
something. And if they got battle damaged or needed any kind of repair they would fly
‘em back into Bien Hoa, and then we’d have to get them fixed so they could go right
back that base. If not, it didn’t have any cover. So they would usually fly them in and
then they, lot of times, they would try to fly ‘em back out that night, if they could.

DB: Was it a team effort, like the previous trip, as far as maintainers working
together? Or were you pretty much specialized then?

EF: Well when I was over there I was in charge of all of the night maintenance on
electronics for that outfit, so I, you know, I had to run from, I, I had planes over in the
Vietnamese Air Force section and I had planes in our U.S. section. So I was, I was
running between the two, two groups working, but we were more specialized over there
in Saigon than we were at the other bases I was at.

DB: Were you all systems qualified then, too, like you were earlier?

EF: Say again.
DB: Were you all systems qualified?

EF: Who, me?

DB: Yes.

EF: Oh, yeah. I could still work either system.

DB: Take care of red Xs and everything? (A red X in aircraft forms indicates a grounding condition)

EF: Right.

DB: When you got to Vietnam, both times really, what was your impression when you first got there? And how did it change between the two?

EF: The first time?

DB: From the first time?

EF: What was it like the first time and how did it change your second time?

EF: Oh, well like I say, the second time I got there, the first time that I landed at Bien Hoa there was only 135 GIs up there and it was the Vietnamese Air Force was just trying to get started.

DB: This was at Tan Son Knut, right?

EF: Yeah, in fact they didn’t even know how to decocoon a T-28. We had to go and show them how to, you know, rip off the preservatives and all. And so when I went back the second time the Vietnamese Air Force was at Bien Hoa. A-1Es and A-1Hs, remember I told you I’d remember those airplanes?

DB: Yeah, as AD-6, Skyraiders?

EF: Skyraiders?

DB: Right.

EF: Okay. They were A-1Hs is what I was in. The Navy equivalent was an AD6. Well, the Vietnamese then, by the time I got back the second time, they had squadrons of A-1Hs, up there. In fact, when I first got to 19th TASS, the second time in Vietnam, I was stationed over on the Vietnamese Air Force side. We had a Quonset hut where we worked on those old Army O-1s. Until later, we closed that out and went back to a new building that was built for us. But there was something like twenty-two thousand men at Bien Hoa the second time, which included the Vietnamese Air Force, a prisoner of war
camp, a Green Beret outfit, helicopter, Army helicopter gunship outfit, 101st Airborne was over on the other side of the runway, and Long Binh, the main Army base, was a few miles away. So it was like, it was like going to, going to an island where you were the only one on it and then come back ten years later and it’s full. That was quite the difference.

DB: Being that crowded, was there ever any problem between the different services or between folks who were there and folks who were forward based?

EF: None that I ever, none that I can remember of. Everybody sort of seemed to stay with their own. Now let me clarify something here. I don’t know what happens, you know, at their clubs and all that, you know, cause I never, I never, I didn’t go to clubs and all, so I don’t know what happened after hours when people quit working and go to the clubs. So, that wasn’t my cup of tea. So some of that could of happened when they got a few beers and all in them and a few drinks, so, but I can’t comment on that part.

DB: Both times you were in Vietnam, were you briefed on the mission and effort? Or do you think you were briefed well on it? You knew why we were there?

EF: No, I can’t say I was.

DB: Do you find this a fault of the leadership, or was it necessary that you guys had to be briefed on the mission?

EF: I don’t think it was necessary. We had so many, we had so, you know, you got a hundred and fifty aircraft in your squadron, like at 19th TASS, and they came from so many different directions, coming in there just to be maintained, and when they flew out of there they’d go three hundred and sixty degrees at bases around that main base. So we were just strictly, mostly a repair center. Now we had, we had some that, that flew missions out of Bien Hoa in the 19th TASS, but our job was strictly maintenance.

DB: How many airplanes were in the squadron?

EF: I think there was about a hundred and fifty of them—in that 19th TASS.

DB: That’s amazing, having that many in a squadron.

EF: And that was, you know, we had about, I think, forty some O-1s and we probably had at least that many O-2s, and I don’t know how many OV-10s we had.

DB: Do you think that the American military accomplished its mission while it was over there?
EF: I don’t think that the military was allowed to do that, personally. I think, personally, I think that the Air Force was handicapped along with all the other organizations over there.

DB: In what way?

EF: They weren’t allowed to fight a war. It was dictated from Washington, DC.

DB: Was it pretty much a general feeling of everybody in-country or once they returned home?

EF: Say again.

DB: Was this a feeling that everybody had while they were in-country or do you think they developed this feeling once they got back to the States?

EF: I think they had a lot of it while they was there. I can remember a couple of instances, in fact, with 19th TASS. We had some rocket pods on these planes, but we had no guns and I can remember an instance where one Marine outfit was like pinned down and couldn’t get any cover and all they had was smoke bombs on it. And he (Marine commander) complained that when he’s down he needs more than smoke bombs, he wanted machine guns put on those planes, or just keep them at home—he didn’t need them. Well I think what it was, that they was wanting more planes over there, you know, which meant, here we go politicking, and I’m just speaking as a layman, you might say, that way they could build more planes back here, spend more money, if they built planes with guns on them instead of putting machine guns on the OV-10s, especially. So he told the Air Force, well if you can’t defend me with more than smoke bombs, just stay home. Don’t send your FAC planes over. Well it wasn’t long after that until we put miniguns on the bottom of the OV-10s. Because, you know, if you’re a grunt over there, you need a little bit more support than a smoke bomb marking a target for some fighter-bomber coming in. And another instance of a pilot that couldn’t bomb, had a bombing target in North Vietnam and overcast and he couldn’t, he couldn’t do it, but on his way back he spotted a train loaded with SAM missiles, but he wasn’t authorized to bomb that because I think all of their bombing sites were told to them what to bomb, so here it is the next day those SAMs would probably be shooting at him, but he couldn’t bomb that trainload of SAMS. So that’s why I say the military wasn’t allowed to do its job, and fight a war. You got too many civilians dictating what the military can do and can’t do.
DB: How do feel about the Vietnamese people?
EF: I have the highest regard for the people. I had some good friends over there, the first time I was over there. That in fact was in the Air Force, the Vietnamese Air Force. I been in their home. I’ve had meals with them. The basic Vietnamese people were a nice group of people.

DB: Do you think that we betrayed them, with the war?
EF: Yes I do, because we didn’t finish our job.

DB: Have you ever been back to Vietnam since the war ended?
EF: No I haven’t.

DB: Would you like to go?
EF: Yes I would. My wife said she wouldn’t want to go, but I would like to go back.

DB: Obviously you’ve got a lot of memories, both good and bad from your tours over there. How do you think they compare to someone who’s a World War II veteran?
EF: I don’t think I saw half of what they saw. I lost some good friends over there, but I don’t think I saw half of what they saw.

DB: When you got back, obviously you were kind of sheltered because you were still in the military when you got back, how were you received in the community, family?
EF: Just like I would “Joe down the street.” It was almost like, oh yeah you been in Vietnam, yeah, you know. It was just, there was really no, no respect that you had served your country over there.

DB: Do you think because you were career military by this time that you saw, you experienced things differently when you got home than someone who was a two year draftee and went back to society?
EF: I probably didn’t pay any more attention, I didn’t pay as much attention to it as say a young draftee or something.

DB: I would just think that because you have a family, a military family, there’s someone you share your troubles with—
EF: I tell you what. My battery is running down on this one here. It’s beeping on me.

DB: Let’s take a ten minute break and I will call you back.
EF: Okay, I’ll get the other phone.

DB: Thank you.

DB: Okay, how have your Vietnam experiences affected your life since you returned home?

EF: Well, really I just considered it as part of my life. I mean it hasn’t affected me one way or another. It was just like another tour of duty.

DB: Do you feel your experiences over there, were they generally positive, or generally negative, or?

EF: They were positive, yeah. I just wished we could have finished it, you know. I’m tired of going to war, our country going to war and never winning anything, you know. We lost out in Korea, we lost out in Vietnam, we’re losing in Iraq. I just don’t see us accomplishing anything by getting people killed anymore.

DB: How do you think that the American mindset has changed over these years as far as approaching war?

EF: Well, I hope they have the same attitude as I have. I think it has hurt our military by the actions that have happened since Korea, to be honest with you.

DB: Let’s look at the enlisted force during you time in the Air Force. We know we talked about the Navy a little bit earlier, but now it’s the Air Force’s turn. How would you rate the people, the enlisted people you dealt with?

EF: How would I rank them?

DB: Right. Yes.

EF: An outstanding group of people. I have very fond memories. I can’t remember more than two or three instance where there was problems by which drastic action had to take place. Overall I would rate the guys excellent.

DB: Obviously during your early part of your career was when they instituted the three supergrades, E-8 and 9, sorry, the supergrades, in the enlisted force.

EF: It’s a little weak, Dennis.

DB: Yes.

EF: Let me, maybe my ear, hold on a minute, I’ve been up to that ear forever.

DB: Okay.

EF: Okay, repeat that please.
DB: Well during the early part of your career they instituted the two supergrades, the E-8 and E-9 grades. How did folks react to that when they first came out? Senior master sergeant, chief master sergeant?

EF: Well, I think the reaction for was for the possibility, there was another avenue for promotions. I don’t think there was anything derogatory about it.

DB: Did a lot of folks feel that maybe this was, kind of showing that the enlisted was more than they had been thought of in the past? That they were capable of doing more things? Or was it just a chance—

EF: I don’t know why it is I’m beginning to lose you for reason.

DB: Okay. Can you hear me now?

EF: Yeah. Let me see if I can get this volume up a little bit more.

DB: Okay.

EF: Best I can get there. Go ahead.

DB: Okay we’re almost done, so. During your time in did you notice any major changes in how the enlisted were viewed by officers?

EF: Oh, heavens yes. Yeah, there was a, there was a lot more openness. There wasn’t that great separation. I would say that there was a hundred percent improvement.

DB: How about the civilians’ view of the enlisted force?

EF: Well, I don’t guess I have a comment on that one.

DB: That’s fine. Mister Fitzpatrick, we really appreciate you taking time today to sit down and go over this interview with me. Do you have any additional comments you’d like to make?

EF: Not right off hand. I believe we’ve covered just about everything that I know of. But I do know that it was, I wouldn’t of traded that military experience for anything in the world. I still, I still enjoy getting e-mails and letters and articles from people that, that I’ve served with. I still, every once in a while, run into people that I served with and it’s just like it was yesterday. I got information just recently from a fellow that I served with aboard an aircraft carrier and have not seen him in fifty some odd years and he sent me letters and papers of stuff that we did in the Navy in the same squadron, even though I didn’t know him because he was in ordnance and I was in electronics, but the things that we did, especially on the Tachen Islands evacuation of the Nationalist Chinese from the,
from the Communist Chinese back in 1955, of how we evacuated those forty some thousand people and so, I appreciate people that have an interest in what’s happened in the past and in the future, so, but other than that I think I have, I’ve covered everything that I can think of.

DB: Well, we thank you.