

**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Ronald Morris  
Conducted by Steve Maxner  
April 9, 2001  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre**

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Ronald  
2 Morris on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 2001 at 11:10. We are in Lubbock, Texas in the Special  
3 Collections Library interview room. Sir, why don't you go ahead and begin by telling us  
4 when and where you were born.

5 Ronald Morris: I was born December 26, 1936 in Beeville, Texas.

6 SM: Did you stay there, where you born and raised there, or did you move around  
7 very much?

8 RM: No, my dad was a driller for a drilling company, and we moved at least once  
9 a year to different oilfields in south and west Texas.

10 SM: Did you have brothers or sisters?

11 RM: No, only child.

12 SM: What was it like, moving around Texas for you? Was it difficult, or did you  
13 have no problems with it?

14 RM: It was part of life as I knew it and so we would move to a new town and a  
15 new school, and I would make new friends, and we would go from there.

16 SM: The business that your father was in, was that something that you had  
17 thought about following in to, or you didn't have any interest in the oil business?

18 RM: When I finished high school in Bowie, I came to Texas Tech to study  
19 Petroleum Engineering in thoughts of following in my dad's footsteps as an engineer  
20 instead of in the drilling part of the business. It turns out that when I graduated in 1962,  
21 the military said I needed to go in the service.

22 SM: The Petroleum Engineering, was that something that you had developed an  
23 interest in early in terms of high school, or what kind of subjects did you enjoy as you  
24 were going to school, as a high schooler?

1 RM: Being raised around the oilfield, that's what I knew. I was also adept in  
2 math, geometry, engineering type things. I had an interest in geology just from looking at  
3 the land, and it seemed like the natural fit to go into petroleum engineering.

4 SM: Did you enjoy sports at all?

5 RM: Basically, no. I could run but not very fast. I was tall but I wasn't good  
6 enough to play basketball. I wasn't strong enough to play football. I was in the band. I  
7 played bass drum in the band, marching band and concert band.

8 SM: So in 1962, this is when you graduated from Texas Tech, your choices were  
9 either to voluntarily go into the military or be drafted?

10 RM: Yes, and to go back a year, in 1961, I knew what was coming, and in order  
11 to get a deferment to finish college, the draft board said I needed to be in a National  
12 Guard unit or Reserve unit. Here at Tech, there was a Mabel security group reserve unit,  
13 and I joined that in 1961, went through two weeks of basic training in San Diego and then  
14 would have attended weekly evening reserve meeting for my last year in order to keep  
15 from being drafted. As it turned out, the Mabel Security Group had a communications  
16 mission, and my security clearance never came through. So I went to the Mabel reserve  
17 meetings, but I had to sit outside the main complex because I didn't have my top-secret  
18 security clearance, so I studied the Morse code, read Navy publications and waited until  
19 graduation.

20 SM: Did your Navy clearance ever come through?

21 RM: The Navy clearance never did come through, so in September of 1962, my  
22 choices were one, to go in the Navy Officer Candidate School in Providence, Rhode  
23 Island, two to go to any Army Officer Candidate School, probably in the southeast, three  
24 to go into Air Force Officer Training school in San Antonio. I chose the Air Force  
25 Officer Training School, entered in September of '62, graduated in December of '62 as a  
26 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant.

27 SM: What made you decide OTS in the Air Force?

28 RM: Well, basically two reasons, I'm from Texas, and so I would rather go to  
29 officer's school in San Antonio then Providence, Rhode Island, and although I was in the  
30 Navy reserve, I know that I have motion sickness, and why go into the Navy and be  
31 seasick all the time?

1 SM: Why not the Army?

2 RM: I never considered the Army. If I were to say with some type of prejudice,  
3 anybody could get in the Army, and so I was smarter than that and wanted to use my  
4 education, and I thought the Air Force would be better.

5 SM: Did you approach an Air Force recruiter, or was this all done through  
6 correspondence and telephone calls, how did this work?

7 RM: No, I did. I talked to a recruiter first in Lubbock, and the regional office  
8 headquarters was in Amarillo, so I drove to Amarillo, talked to a Staff Sergeant there, and  
9 he told me how lucky I was going to be because when I went to the Air Force Officer  
10 Training School, that I could be stationed almost anywhere in the world, and it was a  
11 wonderful career. As it turned out, my first assignment after Officer Training School was  
12 to Amarillo AFB, so I didn't really get very far on the first time. I originally had asked to  
13 be a pilot, and I took the aptitude test for pilot. Was okay, but the vision test, I had an  
14 astigmatism, and they said I could not be a pilot. At that time, I didn't consider being a  
15 navigator, so I went to Officer Training School, was stationed at Amarillo. They had a  
16 Fuels Officer School there, and so I went through the school as a Lieutenant, and then I  
17 stayed as an instructor because of my Petroleum Engineering Degree. At that school is  
18 where officers and enlisted men learned to receive, store, and issue aviation fuels,  
19 typically JP-4.

20 SM: When did you find out that you could do something else, that you could  
21 become a navigator?

22 RM: Once I was at Amarillo for a year, I realized that I enjoyed the Air Force. I  
23 liked the rigor and the organization and the camaraderie and said, 'Well if I'm going to  
24 be in the Air Force, I can make a little more money and have more travel experience by  
25 flying.' Since I can't be a pilot, I applied for navigator school, and in '63, they were  
26 anxious to have navigators, and so I was quickly accepted, and in September, I went  
27 down to James Connally AFB, so I was only in Amarillo less than a year.

28 SM: Now, let's talk about OTS real quick. Why don't you go ahead and describe  
29 your first introduction into the Air Force and OTS and what that training was like.

30 RM: When I left Tech, I had a 1961 Volkswagen bug, but they told me that I  
31 couldn't have a car at Lackland AFB. So as I drove through Wichita Falls to visit my

1 family before I left, I sold the car in Wichita Falls, took a bus down to San Antonio, took  
2 another shuttle bus out to Lackland, and I basically had one suitcase and me. We were  
3 processed in, given the short haircuts, given some uniforms. We started in the military  
4 training. Because I had been in the high school and college band, I know how to march  
5 and how to line up, and because I was a little over six foot tall, I marched in the right-  
6 hand corner of the squad. So I got to be—I don't recall what they call it, but it was an  
7 Assistant Training Officer for Military Bearing and something like that. Even though I  
8 was two weeks into training, I was already in a semi-leadership post because of the  
9 marching experience. The training was military history, military organization, and  
10 officer preparation, and I did well at that. I enjoyed; I did well. I was a distinguished  
11 graduate, and when I finished, they offered me a regular commission instead of a reserve  
12 commission. So I left, already thinking that hey, I like the Air Force, and it could be a  
13 career. One thing I recall from Lackland AFB is that in October of 1962, they had the  
14 Cuban Missile Crisis, and we were there as students, didn't really know what was going  
15 on except our instructors were typically Captains, and we could tell from them that it was  
16 serious. We weren't quarantined or put off base to go into town or off-limits to go into  
17 town, but we knew it was serious. They had meetings that the students didn't get to go  
18 to, probably intelligence briefings, and we were glad when it was over.

19 SM: What did you understand was occurring?

20 RM: Well, we understood that there was what we read in the paper, that the  
21 Russians had installed some type of missiles in Cuba that Kennedy administration was  
22 fighting against it, that LeMay had the Strategic Air Command on 24 hour alert. They'd  
23 moved B-47s and other bombers into bases in Florida, and it was serious.

24 SM: Now did any of the instructors leave, were called up?

25 RM: No, not of them were recalled or called up. They were typically, even  
26 though they may have been pilots and had been fighter pilots in the past, they were sent  
27 there on a three year assignment to be instructors, and they didn't need to call them back.  
28 There may have been reserve units in the U.S. that were called up.

29 SM: What was the most difficult or challenging thing about OTS for you?

30 RM: For me the most difficult was the physical training. We'd get up, get  
31 dressed quickly, march to breakfast, come back, put on our PT clothes, short and T-shirts

1 and go out and do jumping jacks and two mile runs and push-ups. I've never been  
2 heavily athletic, and it was tough, but I did it well enough to graduate.

3 SM: And a distinguished graduate at that. What kind of weapons training did  
4 you receive in OTS?

5 RM: OTS we had a .38 revolver, and they trained us on the close-in shots,  
6 probably 25 to 50 feet, a target in the shape of a man, and they said shoot for the chest.  
7 As I recall, there was a ribbon to be earned from that, and I earned the ribbon. I could  
8 hold my breath and hit the target, marksmanship ribbon.

9 SM: Then once you finished OTS you went straight to Amarillo?

10 RM: I went to Amarillo for less that a year and then down to James Connelly.

11 SM: Now, the school that you went to in Amarillo for fuel handling, how long  
12 was that, and what were the more challenging aspects of that?

13 RM: I think that the school for enlisted men and officers was probably a six-week  
14 school. Students would come in, and they would learn something about the history of  
15 fuels, oils, and lubricants, and the need for it in the Air Force. Then they would learn  
16 about the receipt of the fuel. Typically it would come in on tanker cars or possibly a  
17 pipeline, and then the storage of the fuel was in huge storage tanks, so the preservation  
18 and maintenance of those, and then the issue of the fuel was to fuel trucks or to the on-  
19 base pipeline that went out to the B-52s. One thing I'll try to remember the way it goes,  
20 we received the fuel in equivalent barrels of fuel, they stored it in equivalent gallons of  
21 fuel, and they issued it to the airplanes in pounds of fuel. We joked about it, why have  
22 three different measures for JP-4, but the companies that sell it, sell it in barrels. For  
23 some reason, the Air Force decided that they would count their storage in gallons, and  
24 then they issue it in pounds because the aircraft have to use pounds of fuel in their weight  
25 and balance calculations. That was the fuel trip. We went from there to a real Air Force  
26 Base to see how they received, stored and issued the fuel. I went to Castle AFB in  
27 Merced, California, SAC training base, just to see how it was done.

28 SM: While you were in that training, did they talk much about the environmental  
29 issues in terms of storage and other aspects of fuel management?

30 RM: 1963, there was virtually no emphasis or focus on environmental issues.  
31 There were probably times that used barrels were all taken to one corner of the base and

1 stored outside. Some of them probably turned over and spilled, and that's why now, forty  
2 years later, some bases are having to go through environmental clean up.

3 SM: How about personal safety issues, limiting your exposure, fumes and things  
4 like that, how much of an emphasis was placed on those types of issue?

5 RM: There was instruction on skin contact and fumes. There were some masks  
6 and gloves and protective clothing that we used, and there were some precautions about  
7 those kind of spills. People contamination was covered, but ground contamination was  
8 not as much.

9 SM: Now, I meant to ask you, what did your father think about you going in the  
10 Air Force, did you talk about it much?

11 RM: My father was happy that I went to Texas Tech and studied Petroleum  
12 Engineering. He was also happy that I went into the Air Force. He could tell I enjoyed  
13 it, and he knew from his experience that a confirmed career could be better than the  
14 vagaries of the oilfield. The oilfield in the '40s, '50s and '60s continued to now goes in  
15 cycles of boom and bust. When its boom, everyone's hiring, everyone has a job,  
16 everyone gets overtime, when its bust they store the rigs, they stack the rigs, they lay off  
17 the people. He'd been through that, and he realized with his maturity that I was better off  
18 with a confirmed type career job then being in the oilfield.

19 SM: Now, when you were in the Air Force were you married, at the point where  
20 you went from Amarillo to navigator school?

21 RM: No, when I left Tech, went through training in Amarillo and into navigator  
22 school and through my first couple of assignments, I was single.

23 SM: Where did you go to navigator school?

24 RM: I went to navigator school at James Connelly AFB in Waco, Texas.  
25 Entered, I'd say September, October of 1963, finished in October 1964. One thing  
26 quickly that I recall from that is that I was at Waco, Texas in November of '63 when  
27 Kennedy was killed. As I recall, it was on a Thursday. We were told that afternoon in  
28 class, they said there would be no classes the next day, Friday. As it turned out, the Air  
29 Force in their wisdom, the following week, we had our classes from Monday through  
30 Friday, and they made up that missed day by having us go to class all day Saturday.

1           SM: How did that affect you and your fellow airmen, the assassination of  
2 President Kennedy? Did you talk about much amongst yourselves, and what did you  
3 think?

4           RM: Basically, no. Our students, it seemed like none of them were very  
5 politically active and really cared much for conservative or liberal values, either one, and  
6 didn't think of it in the political fallout. Of course you hate to see the president killed,  
7 but there wasn't any political connotation to it. We wondered as time went by about the  
8 shooting and Jack Ruby and Oswald and just kind of curious, I guess, but it wasn't a big  
9 discussion among our students.

10          SM: Did you yourself have any personal opinion about President Kennedy? Were  
11 you very politically aware?

12          RM: I had wanted Johnson to win in 1960 because Johnson was from Texas, and  
13 I'm from Texas. By the '64 election, I had wanted Goldwater to win because I was  
14 discovering that I was a conservative as opposed to a liberal, but at the time of Kennedy's  
15 death, I wasn't very aware of political connotations to that that.

16          SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Ronald Morris on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April.