YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

Naval Experience

O. H. 97

JOHN C. GILDARD

Interviewed

by

David M. Costello

on

November 22, 1974

JOHN CURTIS GILDARD

John Curtis Gildard was born in Warren, Ohio on December 25, 1944. After graduating from Warren G. Harding High School in 1963, he attended Kent State University for one-and-a-half years and would later graduate from Youngstown State University in January of 1976 with an A.B. degree.

While in school, Gildard's education was interrupted by the Vietnam War and on July 14, 1965 he enlisted in the Navy rather than face the consequences of the draft. Gildard left for active duty in September of 1965 and was sent to San Diego, California for his basic training. After basic training Gildard was sent to a special school in Sandia Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he was introduced to the world of nuclear weapons. After an intensive twelve-week training period he was assigned to the Bon Homme Richard CVA-31, which was a naval aircraft carrier. During Gildard's first year he was mainly concerned with the assembly of fuses for conventional ordnances. However, the second, third, and fourth years he was part of a team of three hundred that worked on conventional bombs. This would be the activity that would keep him occupied for the next three years. Gildard was never involved in heavy combat duty

in Southeast Asia, so he has a different view on the Vietnam War in comparison to other veterans.

Gildard and his wife, Tamsen, are currently living in the Youngstown area and they hope to, in the near future, move to Oregon and perhaps try their hand at farming. Interested in backpacking, photography, bicycling, and conservation, he is a member of the American Anthropological Association, the Association for Asian Studies, and the American Association for Advancement of Science.

Julie DiSibio

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN C. GILDARD

INTERVIEWER: David M. Costello

SUBJECT: Naval Experience

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C: This is an interview with John Gildard for the Youngstown State University, Veterans Project by David Costello at 449 Crandall, at approximately 3:00 p.m. on November 22, 1974.

Good afternoon, John. First, I'd like to ask you some introductory questions about your experience in the service. Why did you go into the service?

G: I had one of two choices: either get drafted in the Army, or enlist in the Navy. So I took the latter one and I enlisted in the Navy.

C: How long were you in the service?

G: Active duty, four years.

C: When did you go into the service?

G: I was sworn in on July 14, and I left for active duty on September 28, 1965. Then I was released from active duty September 22, 1969.

C: Where did you go for your basic training?

G: San Diego, California.

C: How long were you there?

G: From September 28 until December 7.

C: After you finished your basic training did you go to any schools or anything?

G: I was assigned to Phase One of Gunner's Med-Technician "A" School, Great Lakes, Illinois. The second part was at Sandia Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was there for approximately twelve weeks.

C: What did that school include?

G: My primary training was nuclear weapons or warheads assemblage, test, storage, and preparation for use.

C: Did you feel that the training you got was good training?

G: Are you referring to the technical training?

C: Right.

G: Yes. It's hard to say because there's nothing I can apply it to. The only part that I could apply, possibly, is learning wiring. There's nothing in nuclear weapons that could be applied to civilian use whatsoever.

C: How about for your military job itself? Was the training good for what you did in the service?

G: Yes. The experience and the idea of having responsibility--being at least partially in a leadership capacity, having at times two hundred and some men working for me has been of invaluable experience, especially in looking for a job.

C: When did you finally get orders to go overseas to Vietnam? How long were you in the service?

G: In the sense you're referring to, at least in the Navy, we never got those. I was assigned to a ship so we left when the ship pulled out. It really never phased me until we got there, I think, mostly due to the fact of being on a ship. It's hard to say, but to give a generality, we were about sixty-five miles from downtown Hanoi. Or, to give a better relationship, it would be like sitting in the middle of Lake Erie and bombing Youngstown. That's about where we were in relationship from the sea to where downtown Hanoi was.

C: What was the name of the ship you were on?

G: Bon Homme Richard, CVA-31.

C: How long were you actually in the area?

G: I can't give you an accurate count. The best I can do is give you a generalization. We would be on Yankee Station, or in other words, on combat operations for about forty days. Then we'd be off anywhere from three days to maybe up to twelve days. And we'd do this on a rotation basis.

In 1967, we were gone for seven months, 1968 we were gone for ten months, and then I was gone in 1969 for about six or seven months. The ship was there for about another four or six weeks. I left and came back to the United States to get separated.

C: You spent quite a lot of time there then.

G: Yes.

C: It's not the kind of thing where you just got orders like in the Army or in the Air Force.

G: No, no.

C: And you went over and did a thirteen month tour and then came back.

G: No. It was a steady rotation basis with the United States Navy.

C: I see. How did you feel though when you first got there? What were your feelings? Was there anything like, "Here I am, I'm finally at the war," this sort of feeling at all, or any fear? What went through your head?

G: No, it really wasn't much different than anything previous because we used to see the coast once in awhile but not that often. Most of our time was at sea, and by that time, it's hard to say but I'd already seen enough ocean. You've seen one, you've seen them all. It would take us about a month. From the time we left San Diego it would take us about a week to get to Pearl Harbor, then we'd have to be in Pearl Harbor for a week, ten days. We had what were called

Operational Readiness Exercises. They went all through a whole series of mock war games. Then you were evaluated, that is, the whole ship, the air wing, everybody as a unit was evaluated by a commander in chief of the Pacific. Then we'd leave Hawaii. It would take us about eight days to get to Japan. We'd be in Japan for about five days. The basic reason for that was that we would, in a sense, be relieving another aircraft carrier for combat duty.

Most of the officers, that is, the senior officers, the captain, the executive officer, the air operations officer, our weapon's officer, and a few of the other senior officers would come over to our ship and tell us what they had experienced. So the ship knew what, more or less, to look forward to. Then we'd be there, as I said, for about five days. It would take us three-and-a-half, four days, we'd go down to the Philippines, take on ordnance, then it was about eighteen hours from there out to Yankee Station. That's basically the way it would run every year.

C: That was the pattern?

G: That was the pattern.

C: I see. This is quite a lot different than talking to men who were on land, in the Army and the Marines, and even some of the Air Force men. Did you feel that while you were on ship then, you were doing what you were trained for, in terms of your training?

G: No. My primary training along with those others of us in the division, was nuclear weapons and warheads. Since you're going through experience, the first year we did nothing but assemble fuses for conventional ordnance.

The second year and the third year, they put us working on a conventional bomb--it was called a DST, a specific type of conventional explosive--and I would say there were no more than maybe three hundred men who ever worked on them. Not to be egotistical or anything, but they basically wanted us to put this special type of explosive together due to the fact of our training. Mostly in nuclear weapons, you'd follow a specific manual, do it step by step by step, et cetera. This is

the reason they wanted us to put them together, because they knew if we put them together, through our training, it would more than likely work.

Most of our division, men who were my age, had anywhere from one to three years of college. So it was much easier to work with something like that as opposed to the other ordnance divisions. Most of them usually were animals--high school drop-outs, and the rest of them--and trying to get them to do something, as to work on a specific type of ordnance or even a special type of electronic equipment, you couldn't get them to do anything.

C: When you went into the service, were you already graduated from college?

G: No. I had about a year-and-a-half at Kent State.

C: Were you married at the time?

G: No. I didn't meet my wife until after I got out of the service.

C: Basically, what were your living conditions like on the ship?

G: I would say the living room and the kitchen were probably about thirty-five feet long and probably twenty feet wide. We had a compartment and we had twenty-seven racks in there and that's where we slept.

We were the fourth deck down, the first compartment in the "B" section of the ship. Over top of us we had another living compartment. Over that we had a machinery elevator room for one of the aircraft elevators, and underneath us we had 35,000 gallons of diesel oil. We had three racks high.

It was supposed to be air-conditioned but it was about seventy-five degrees. The temperature in the magazines ran a hundred, or near a hundred degrees. Our assemblage area ran over a hundred and some. In that sense, yes, we had it a lot better off than ground pounders did due to the fact that we used to sleep in a bed and that's better than sleeping standing up.

Foodwise, it would vary. Sometimes it was very excellent and sometimes I wouldn't even feed it to the fish. It would probably kill them. I'd gotten food poisoning once or twice off of the food we had, mostly due to the fact that we carried fully loaded with an air wing, about three thousand men. Sometimes the food was good and sometimes it was bad. But when you have to prepare it in mass numbers, and we fed, I would say, about twenty-one hours a day. Breakfast was from five-thirty in the morning, I think, until eight; and then lunch ran from ten until one-thirty; then, I think, supper ran from four till eight-thirty. Then we had midnight rations from about eleven till one-thirty in the morning. So it would be, I think about twenty-one hours.

C: How did your job or your duty hours run?

G: When we were in combat operations the second and third year, it was twelve hours on, twelve hours off. I worked the night crew. We worked from six at night until six in the morning, seven days a week.

C: How did you feel about your job itself?

G: The first year I couldn't stand it because as I said, due to my training we were behind locked doors with armed guards. We had to wear a badge around our neck. It got very bad after awhile. I was starting to climb the walls in fact because if they didn't have anything to do for us, they'd give us buckets of water and scouring powder and sponges and order us to clean the walls down.

When we got finished with that, we'd sweep the floor out of the magazine. Then when we got done with that, we'd swab the deck; and when we got finished with that, we'd go back and clean the walls. Then when it really got bad, they'd find something else for us to do. It was referred to as nonproductive busy work.

C: And how about the second and third years?

G: It was twelve hours a day, seven days a week and I enjoyed it, in the sense that at least we did something. We were busy, not from the standpoint of nonproductive work, but from the standpoint of actually doing something.

One time, a friend of mine--when we were back in the United States--wanted to get off the ship and get transferred back closer to home. He'd been in about eight or nine years and he knew how to go about it so I went with him over to what was called EDPAC, which was Enlisted Personnel Distribution Pacific. They cut most all the orders for people from the Pacific area, in other words a ship or unit would send in and they would have a report. I don't remember what it was called or how often it had to be sent in. Various rates; I think every six months or maybe every quarter, they would say, "All right, these are the number of people we are allotted, these are the number of people we have. We are going to be minus so many people by this specific date. We need this many in E-1 through E-3, E-4, E-5, 6, et cetera."

So he went over there to see if he could get transferred and he couldn't. There was an E-7 over there working and he told me they had openings for six staff jobs in Saigon and I signed for that; unfortunately I never got it because they cancelled the orders. I wanted to get off of there. I wanted to get off and get attached to swift boats or get transferred to front line combat duty, mostly for the fact of being bored to death.

C: I know being in the service and talking to a lot of fellow servicemen that boredom is a major factor in service life at times. What did you do with your leisure time on ship? What did you do to forget about boredom, anything during your twelve hours off?

G: Mostly, we got off work at six o'clock in the morning and usually went to sleep by about seven in the morning and slept till about four-thirty in the afternoon. When we were on twelve hour shifts, it was much easier and we'd just sleep.

C: What can you do on ship for leisure?

G: We had a closed circuit television where we had two networks. One was what was called PLAT, which was Plane Launch and Aircraft Takeoff. In other words, they had a closed circuit television that monitored the flight deck for incoming aircraft and for launches. So if something happened

they would at least have a visual record of it. I stood and watched the Forrestal when she burned. There were 139 men killed on that. They had the films of it. The basic purpose is for air safety--they have a wreck, they can go through and see it.

We had another channel they used for other purposes, mostly for recreation for the ship. We would get tapes from stateside. We would get something like "Ironside"--the only thing I can remember. Or it was mostly tape some of the networks would supply and they would send them out through the USO or some of the other Armed Forces recreation branch and they would play it.

We had one lifer who was, I think you could refer to as a size nineteen neck and a hat size of zero, and a space of about two feet in between his ears which occupied nothing. Unfortunately, there was no moss growing up there. That might have benefited him. They showed all of [the movie] at night, which is when we worked. They also turned the fresh water on to take showers after four or five days, and they did those at night, so we never took a shower. He decided there wasn't any explosives to build and he'd have us do something; he couldn't have us sit by and watch the movie that they would run or either go take a shower. He decided he had to have us do something.

C: When you refer to "he," who do you mean?

G: He was in E-6. His name was Wesenhan.

C: Okay. I thought you meant the same individual with the zero.

G: No, no, that's the same one. Unfortunately, he's still alive. They had him on other ships and it has been done; they would either put them over the side, or as you know as well as I do from being in Southeast Asia you could usually have somebody done away with for about five dollars. That's how bad it was, in that respect.

C: I'm really curious in this area about ship life, first of all because I have very little knowledge of it and secondly, I think it's been somewhat romanticized by Hogan's Heroes and just other

things that make you think that sailors on ship often have such a good time. Did you make any friendships there that you've kept?

G: Yes.

C: You know how friendships and humor keep you going.

G: Yes. In fact, this one guy--that's how I met my wife--he and I were on the same ship together for thirty-seven months and his wife worked with mine. And that's how I met my wife. We still write and we still see each other.

I have a friend that, well right now he's deputy sheriff of one of the southern counties in Oregon. My wife and I would like to move out to the Northwest, so we'll probably see him. And we still keep in contact with him.

C: That's all right. That's where we're going, too. That's God's country.

G: If the economy doesn't open up, I'm going back to farming.

C: We've looked at the beginning of your experiences here and talked about living conditions and food. Something that oftentimes, I think, comes up is how is the troop morale on board? Now we discussed your own.

G: It all depended upon who was the commanding officer of the ship, your division officer and also senior enlisted, either E-6 or E-7s. I think the morale was highest in the ship when we had one commanding officer whose theory was when we went into combat operations, you worked twelve to eighteen hours a day. When we pulled into port he expected you to be off the ship at nine o'clock in the morning. The only ones that were supposed to be left on the ship were members of duty section and he expected no work done unless there was an emergency, which was very nice, mostly due to the fact that I was fortunate from being on there of being able to see half the world--I've been to Hawaii three times, been to Japan nine times, to the Philippines twenty some; been to Hong Kong once; I've been to Singapore and Malaya. I've been across the equator--in the idea or frame of reference of being able to go someplace, being

able to see something.

He was completely the opposite, like day and night, to use that analogy--the commanding officer previous to him. His idea was he wanted you to work combat operations twelve to eighteen hours a day and then when you pulled into port, he expected you to work from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon and then get off and hit the beach at about four-thirty or five o'clock and be back by midnight.

And then the one we had before that was an alcoholic. In fact, one time we were out off San Diego for underway operations or shakedowns, something like this; we came back through the channel, which was maybe five to eight miles long. And the fog literally was so thick you couldn't see the nose in front of your face. They wanted him to slow down and he steamed into port at about twenty some knots going through the channel, ran over a few buoys and telephone cables, and he really didn't care. Nothing bothered him. When we were empty we weighed about 34,000 or 38,000 tons; and he didn't want to slow down. And ships have no brakes.

One other time we were going out for Independence Day cruises. Those basically were scheduled once a year when we were in the States. You could have your family come on and you'd bring your wives and kids and everybody out and they'd go out for an afternoon off San Diego for maybe five or ten miles out. They'd have a few launchings and landings and you could go all over the ship, which was enjoyable for a lot of the family to actually see what was going on.

On a ship that size, you carried about eight or nine lines to untie and those were howsers. The howser is anything five inches or larger in diameter of a rope. So we had about eight or nine lines, I think, that would tie the ship up. Well, they didn't get all the tugs there to untie them so he said the hell with it and just pulled out and took a few stanchions off the pier with us. He used to also go out and get drunk and leave his car and then they'd have to send out half the Marine detachment in San Diego or Honolulu to go find it.

C: I'm asking this with complete naiveté about how this works, but when you'd go into port, for example, say you finished an operation, how long would you stay in port? What exactly took place? Can you give me a little background on that?

G: Certain operations have to be done mostly engineeringwise, that is, down in the hole it's referred to, where the turbines, the boilers, and the shafts were; in other words, to slow the speed down in the ship. Then you would have a pilot that would come on board prior to entrance in the channel because he knew the channel, he knew the currents, the tides, the eddies; he knew the whole channel like the back of his hand. So he would be on the bridge, he would guide the ship in, the helmsman would steer and he would tell them where to go.

Depending upon the harbor, whether you were going to anchor out or whether you were going to tie up at the side, they would have tugs that would come out and guide you into the pier because there's no way you're going to get 45,000 tons of ship to slow down and ease up against the pier. That thing sort of bangs up. The tugs would more or less ease them in and they would normally throw the bowlines over. They would tie them up this way (shows) and then they'd bring the stern in this way. Then they'd put all the rest of the lines on after that. You usually had normally ten or fifteen men on the pier.

Then we had Deck divisions, which were boatswain who did nothing but handle lines and did the painting throughout the majority of the ship, the external part. So they would help tie the ship up. Then they would put the gangway down.

The Navy at that time, outside the United States, was divided into three sections. The entire ship would be divided into sections by each specific division. To give you an estimation, our division was twenty-five men. A Deck division would have sixty men in it. An Engineering division would have sixty men. So each division was divided up into three sections. You had to maintain one section on board that ship at all times. In other words, you had thirty-three-and-a-third percent of the crew on board at all times.

One time in 1969 we had just pulled into the Philippines. Most of the ship had taken off and hit the beach, and they came across with an emergency flash precedence message. They had shot an EC1-21 down in North Korea. I'm not sure if you remember that; it was one of those recon planes.

C: No, I don't recall.

G: Well, somebody got scared in the Pentagon and they sent half the Seventh Fleet up to North Korean waters, and they told us we had to go right into combat operations. So we roughly left about one-third of the ship on the beach. And they just took off and left.

What they usually do is get a few aircraft together that will carry men and send them back out or put them on ships and catch them. Our chief was literally hanging onto one of the lines when the ship was pulling away from the pier, hanging on the line, crawling up the side. That is nothing unusual.

C: How long would you be in port? Did this vary?

G: Yes. In 1967, we would be in port three or four days, then go out for forty some days. It slacked off in 1968 and we'd be in port for four to eight days. Then in 1969, it was really lax. We went up to Japan, we were in port for ten days and we went up into North Korean waters, the Sea of Japan, for seven days, came back in for another ten or twelve days, left Japan and went south as fast as possible. Then we hadn't been in any combat operations and I think we had about a half day to go to the end of the month, so we sent one plane into North Vietnam just to hit the combat zone and come back. So the entire three thousand men collected combat pay, nontaxable, for the entire month.

C: Going back to when you were in port, two questions come up. What, basically, could you do? What did you do when you were in port?

G: It all depended on where you were. In the Philippines, most of us would either go out to "Grandy Island," I'm not sure if you're familiar with their harbor but it was a huge one. It was about

ten or fifteen miles across. That's an overestimation. It was a very large harbor. There was an island out in the middle, maybe it was the size of Wick Park. That would give you an idea. It's been over five years.

Then there was another island. There was one small bar out there near the hotel and then there was another large bar that was covered, they had large screens on it. So, I got a lot of diving time in. The water was about sixty feet deep, you could see the bottom. We'd get in a lot of diving out there and then we'd quit about three or four o'clock in the afternoon and spend the rest of the time doing nothing but drinking beer.

And the rest of the time--if you didn't have anything else to do--you could go in town. The town's population would fluctuate anywhere from, at least they told us about 75,000 to 150,000 depending upon the ships that were in. Subic Bay, which was a Naval Station, was the furthest point the United States had bases outside of Nam. The downtown stretch had, I think I'm off in my estimation, but I've stood shore patrol in that entire section at one time or another and there's about a five to seven mile stretch of dirt road. There were about fifteen hotels, about twelve restaurants and about four hundred bars, and about four thousand prostitutes.

And I've come to find out from doing some more readings that there were roughly two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a month that went outside that gate, that supported that town. Most of the money usually went to the whore houses or to alcohol. There was very little dope that went through that place. When I left there in 1969, I don't think there was any grass that went through there. There was counterfeit money that was printed and circulated. There might have been any type of dope that was run through there, that I really couldn't tell you, after I left.

C: How were sailors received?

G: It all depended upon where you were. I really didn't like the Philippines too much, mostly due to the fact that I stood shore patrol in that place enough times. It is an extremely

violent society and I still keep up with it, which was part of the basis for my studies at the university because I have a minor in Asian History. So I saw some of it firsthand and I still keep up on it.

The Philippines is a very tight society in the fact that it is a military dictatorship run by Marcos. He has a national police force called a constabulary. They would shoot first and ask questions later because I've seen them do it.

The mayor, who ran the city, took over from her husband after somebody got him with six hand grenades one time. She carried her own private army of 150 storm troopers, if you want to use that term. They were all short little Filipinos at about my size, which would make them about 5 foot 6, and I weighed 125 pounds then, but that's about what they weighed. They all wore very stiff starched khakis. They used to wear a .45 strapped around their waist and on one shoulder they carried a Thompson submachine gun and on the other one they carried a sawed-off riot gun.

I remember one night, I came out of a bar. I was so drunk I was seeing double. I sobered up in about ten minutes because two of them were coming down the street and one had a shotgun with a clip on it. He had the stock taken off and had a pistol grip on it. The other one had a Thompson submachine gun and a few other clips strung around his shoulders.

They used to have a lot of petty thievery and I've literally seen them kill about half a dozen of them for it. You used to wear watches and you would wear the real thin bands and they would come up on your arm and grab the back of it and just yank it so the watch would come off intact. They could always replace the band when they were going to sell it. And they would take them over and give them to somebody else and trade them off.

This one night--I know because I was standing shore patrol--this one guy had his watch stolen and this one Filipino was running down toward this bridge and jumped off the bridge into the waters, waiting for some guy to pick him up.

One of the police leaned over with a 12-gauge shotgun and blew him apart in mid-air. He hit the water in about a dozen pieces. That was normality for that place. Robbery and murder were nothing unusual. Those were normal day activities. If you got outside of the city, it wasn't bad. It was a--I'm using the term--"peasant society"--because I have a background in anthropology and the fact that it was not primitive nor was it industrial or a technological society. They were peasants. They were farmers, rice farmers. They had water buffalo, if they were lucky.

We were about ninety miles west of Manila. I was down in Manila once. It's nothing more than another major large metropolitan city like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Rome, Paris, Tokyo, et cetera. The greater majority of the Philippines was a peasant society as I mentioned, a lot of it very backward, very little education. You probably saw that in Nam with a greater majority of the people that lived outside the cities. It was a peasant society, in other words, they were farmers, most of them very poor.

Singapore, I enjoyed very much. In fact, my wife and I still write to a girl that I met in Singapore. She and her family run a furniture store; they actually make furniture there. We still correspond with them. I enjoyed Singapore very much. It is a free port, in other words, nontaxable for anything, which again has helped me in my university studies in anthropology.

They survive, that is, their economy survives due to trade. Singapore has a gold dollar exchange. There's European, the Euro dollar. Well, they have one for the Asian dollar. They run it out of Singapore. A lot of American industries have invested in Singapore in electronics manufacturing there. I enjoyed it. It was an extremely unusual place due to the fact that there's a hundred and some square miles and about two and a quarter million people. There were a lot of people from Malaya. The Chinese make up the greater percentage of the population. You had the Indian, Indians were there. Most of them served as guards.

It was very unusual in the fact you would have a slum and two streets down from that, in parallel would be the embassies. I remember the Thailand embassy was right down from a bar that we used to go to and across from that was a Mercedes-Benz dealer.

C: Contrasts.

G: Extremely, more so. Yes, it was more of a contrast than Hong Kong was.

C: When you got back on ship, and so forth, after possibly being in port, whether it was a place you liked or not, and got all the men back together on ship, did you have any problems then, stemming from any racial incidents?

G: No, we had no racial incidents whatsoever. That is, in the time frame that I was on the ship--from August of 1966 till September 1969 we had none.

C: And you didn't have any drug problems?

G: Drug problems--the only that we had were from marijuana. I think there might have been one or two acid freaks, if you want to use that term not derogatory, but as a classification term. Nobody was on hard core dope.

C: It wasn't widespread then, was it?

G: No. The only thing they did, I think, was in 1968 busted two hundred and some guys. Article Fifteen of the Navy called the Captain's MAST, for marijuana. That was automatic. If you were E-4, they reduced you. If you were E-4 or up, NCO grade, they reduced you one step. If you were E-3 and below, they put you in the brig for thirty days. And if you held a security clearance it was worse. They yanked it. So that's why none of us bothered with it.

C: Yes, I know. They used that technique in the Army, too.

G: So the outlet--I'm trying to get away from structured terms in anthropology or sociology and the rest of the ologies but more or less--the accepted outlet was alcohol. So as long as you were drunk they wouldn't bother with you. But if you started

to touch grass, that's another world unto its own.

C: Now as far as the ship itself, aside from the off-duty hours, when you did go into combat operations how did it work?

G: Basically, to go from year to year is the easiest way to do it.

C: Okay, fine.

G: We got into combat in 1967, around the end of February 1967. We did a few combat operations for awhile, I think it was either May 17 or May 18, I can't remember exactly. It was about four or five days after Mother's Day.

There was ours and three other aircraft carriers and they lined them all up at the same time out there and sent four hundred aircraft into downtown Hanoi, flights, one right after another. They managed to level 55 percent of the thermal power producing, that is, the coal, electric, and generating plants; the rail yards. We were awarded the Navy Unit Citation for that one.

Then the rest of that time we were confined to the areas of downtown Hanoi, in the industrial sections of downtown Hanoi and the thermal power producing plants or generator plants. I know you're going to ask this question. In the three years that I was there--and I have slides of them at home--none of the pilots ever intentionally went into any of the villages. If they ever bombed a village it was by accident. I know, I've seen the combat photos.

We went into an airfield called Kep, which is about thirty-seven miles south of the Chinese border and they got five MIGs on the ground there. There was air-to-air combat off and on for the three years. Our ship managed, well, the pilots did, nineteen MIGs in three years they shot down. In 1967 we lost, which were the heaviest losses, twenty-five aircraft and twenty pilots. And some of the POWs that came back in 1973--I remember watching some of the pilots come back and I'd known two or three of them myself. They were lost in 1967 and they'd been prisoners, POWs, since 1967.

The rest of our combat operations in 1967 were confined to major industrial and/or logistics supply lines. In 1968 we were gone for about ten months. We went into port facilities in Hon Gay, which was north-northeast of Haiphong Harbor, and the rail yards and port facilities in Vinh Son.

We also flew for about forty days out of seventy-seven days cover support for the TET offensive for the Marines who were pinned down in Kai Son. That was a very heavy bombing. That was some of the heaviest I've ever seen, in other words, continual operation. All that I know about that was what I read in Stars and Stripes and they were publishing a death list then, until they stopped. Horrid is a bad word to use. There must have been slaughter on both sides, tremendous just from the amount of ordnance that we put out in that time, flying cover support for the Marines.

C: I think the questions here are of a more ad-lib nature on my part because, again, I have a certain naiveté about your operations, but you said you put out a lot of ordnance. What did you have flying off your ship, what type of aircraft?

G: A-4s, which were a daylight attack aircraft; F-8s, which were an older aircraft. We also flew two or three F-8s as fighter photos. By the way, the photographic equipment weighed more than the machine guns so the only armor the pilot had was the .38 he carried under his shoulders. I wouldn't fly one of those things for anything.

We carried two whales, which was a nickname. The Navy lists them as an A-3. The Air Force lists them as a B-66. In 1967 we carried the last squadron of Spads, which were the propeller-driven A-1 sky riders, vintage from Korean War.

The Air Force took them from us and the United States government, in turn, sold them to the Cambodians and I watched them on NBC news getting blown up in Phnom Penh. It was the same aircraft we carried. They were very good for combat aircraft in that area, single propeller, reciprocating engine, could fly very low and very slow. And it was almost an impossibility to shoot one of those things down. I've seen them come back with bullet holes all through those things and

they still fly. And I've seen some of the jets. You put bullet holes through the side of them and the jet flies like a lead balloon when they're hit. They just "phrrrrt" and drop. I've seen some of them come back. If they hit them in the wing, they weren't too bad. I saw one or two of them come back with holes big enough you could walk through them. A lot of other ones shot up. Either pilots shot up or hydraulic equipment all banged up.

C: Say you were going into an operation and you were going to send planes out, certain planes.

G: How did it work?

C: Yes. For example, did you get closer to shore? How did this situation work?

G: No. I was fortunate also. I used to read the orders, preliminary orders, I think, a month or six weeks combat operations would come out of staff Saigon. Overall plans would come out of Honolulu, commander in chief of Pacific. They would formulate the plans, then they in turn would also have a daily bombing schedule for twenty-four hours. They would send the messages out because I used to pick the messages up. They would say, "All right, these are the targets that you will be assigned, these specific dates." And they used to give us like a six-week advance notice.

In turn, the ship would publish two lists. One was a combat ordnance sheet and the other one was an aircraft sheet. The aircraft sheet used to list the aircraft by its number, by its squadron; which was going in which flight, and they would send approximately 25 aircraft out on a launch. They would give them, on that sheet, the fuel, eight thousand pounds that they would carry. The ordnance sheet would tell you what type of bomb you had, what type of pin configuration you had; did you have a tail fuse, did you have a nose fuse; did you have an electro-mechanical fuse, did you have a time delay, did you have a cookie cutter on them; did you use DSTs, did we use smart bombs.

We never used napalm. It was too dangerous because part of our flight deck was wood, and that was bad enough. We carried napalm tanks, but they

never let us use it. It was too dangerous. They didn't want anything happening. One thing about the Navy that makes it different from the rest of the services: in the other services if a plane crashes, if you have a tremendous explosion or accident, everybody gets in a bunch of vehicles and goes like a bat out of hell someplace. When you're in the middle of the ocean, there's no place to go except swim. And we used to have sea snakes up there.

Basically, flight operations would be on a twelve-hour basis. From whenever they would start, then they would end twelve hours later. We would get the ordnance sheet from ordnance control. They would publish it and they used to go up to the weapons office and pick it up. I used to run the night turn. I had another E-6, the idiot that was in charge of the whole thing, but he usually sat upstairs and didn't do anything except create messes for us. They didn't have anything else to do.

So we'd bring it back down and figure out how many DSTs we had to put together or other type of explosives, how many fuses we had to put together. Then we'd spend the rest of the night doing nothing but assembling the ordnance.

C: Did the ship itself then move in at all?

G: No. They would move in some. Basically, they called it Yankee Station because it was shaped like a Y. At all times you would carry three aircraft carriers, one at each end, terminus of the Y. It would go in a big oval shape and it would be about a three hundred mile in twenty-four hours. I don't know how long the oval was. I would probably say fifty miles from one end of the oval to the other.

All we would do for launching of aircraft would be to turn into the wind. They would launch approximately 25 aircraft at a time. What they would do is, flight quarters would go about an hour-and-a-half before launch. At that time they would have all the aircraft prepped and ready to go. They'd run all the ordnance to the flight deck, which was called the roof, load them, fuel them, make the last minute mechanical checks that you had on the check list; if you were familiar with aircraft or any other of

this type of equipment, line them up on the flight deck the way they were supposed to go in order or precedence of launch. Launch would come up and they would send them out.

As soon as the last aircraft was off the deck, they would turn out of the wind and go back onto their other path or circle. That would give you an hour-and-a-half between the next launch. They would launch them and then they would recover the previous flight. So in between that hour-and-a-half from the first launch, they'd bring up twenty-five more aircraft. They would fuel them, load them with the ordnance, make the last minute mechanical checks, line them up the way they were supposed to, by preference of launch, launch the aircraft while they were still in the wind; then they would recover the other twenty-five aircraft from the first launch and then you just keep going in a circle like that for twelve hours.

C: John, when you were on ship then, on duty, and so forth, or even off duty, in all the time you were there, did your ship itself ever come under any attack by the enemy?

G: We had two or three, I think. We had PT boats in 1967 that were coming out. That's why we carried the propeller-driven aircraft, the A-1s, the Spads. They were slow enough and could fly low enough to usually destroy PT boats that came out. After that, the majority of ours was due to some foul up someplace.

One time it scared the hell out of almost everybody. We took on fuel every other day and then the other days we took on 160 tons of explosives. I used to be in the hangar deck and I used to have all the ordnance come on board, and then I was responsible for the unpackaging and the transfer to all the magazines, and that is 160 tons. I used to have two hundred men working for me. We had all 160 tons or the greater majority of it on board. The rest of it was on the ammunition ship.

It was alongside of us, called UNREP, which is short for Underway Replenishment, where both ships slow down to eight knots and steer on one continuous course and then transfer them or high line them across the sea.

During that time most of the ordnance was transferred on board our ship. On the ammunition ship, they had the remainder all out on deck. There was an unidentified aircraft that was picked up on the radar scope and they could get no radio communications with it. It was too far out for visual communications so they called what is referred to as "air quarters." Everybody who had stations for aircraft went up and they launched one aircraft and before they could get up there, they called "general quarters," which is more or less, "All hands, man your battle stations."

And that probably scared everybody to death mostly because of the fact they didn't know what it was and we had heard rumors where most of us worked that somebody in intelligence had gotten word someplace that some of the North Vietnamese wanted to try a suicide mission, the few MIG aircraft loaded with as many explosives as they could get on there and try and fly it into the middle of one of the aircraft carriers. So we all slightly nervously I would say is an understatement went down to our battle stations and I was fortunate mine was ten feet below the water line and sat on top of one thousand pound bombs with 96,000 gallons of aviation gasoline. So if anything happened, you'd know it.

C: What happened?

G: It ended up to be one of ours. A crewman's radio was broken up.

C: I see.

G: The rest of our problems, at least, it wasn't too much of combat activity, but were accidents. There were about twenty some men that were killed on the USS Oriskany CVA-34 and another twenty or thirty of them killed on the Kitty Hawk. I watched the Forrestal burn. There were 134 men killed on that.

Most of ours were accidents. We had not too much in the way of combat activity, that is, danger from being killed from the North Vietnamese or the Chinese, et cetera. Most of ours were due to accident. I've come across that several times.

Two or three times somebody would send back down a load of five hundred pound bombs in a truck, where they would have two bombs on top and one on the bottom in a triangle, only reversed. They sent them back down and they didn't strap them down, and then they would fall off and roll across the bomb assembly area.

Usually, one or two of us would stay there because we figured if it went up it wouldn't make any difference. And I've never seen people run so fast in my entire life. So we usually would put the pin back into it so it wouldn't go off or either stop the timer and then we would call EOD, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, and come down and get rid of it. We'd figure it was much easier just taking care of it there. You can't run very far; whereas they used to say you stand on the bow in the Enterprise, you're fifteen hundred feet from ground zero so it doesn't make any difference.

C: Did you, during any period of the time--although I think I already know the answer to this but again, I'd like to ascertain this--did you have any chance to go into Vietnam at all in your service?

G: Myself, no. We would be the last ones that would ever go in. There was no reason for us to go in.

C: So, in other words, you never went on land or met the people of Vietnam?

G: No, I was never inshore. The closest I ever got was seeing the shoreline. We would get that close. I never saw them but we used to see the flashes at night from the 1-55s up in the DMZ.

C: Did your ship have guns on board that did shell?

G: No. We carried four 5-inch 38 calibers but that was more only as a defense. We never shelled. Those would be tin cans. And if you want somebody else to talk to, I can get hold of him; he was a mount captain on a can.

C: Sure. When we finish up, possibly we could get his address. I'd be interested. Getting back then, specifically to your situation, since you didn't get into Vietnam, I would think then that

your conception of the enemy was an impersonal one.

G: Yes. We picked up, I think, six or seven Vietnamese one time in a sampan. We never knew what they were, whether they were South Vietnamese or whether they were North Vietnamese regulars or Viet Cong or what.

The only other contact we came into was with the Chinese and the Russians. If we would lose something there would usually be a troller up there, and we had a standing joke: If we couldn't find four or five bombs we'd call them up and ask them because they could tell us where they were.

C: They were active?

G: Yes. We used to have flyovers by the Soviet Air Force in the middle of the Pacific. The rest of the time that we were up in the territorial contingent waters of North Vietnam we had a Chinese troller with us all the time, not with us but in that area, at least one. And as I said, it was a standing joke if we couldn't find any bombs and we couldn't account for them, we'd call them up and ask them.

C: Were there ever any clashes with them?

G: No. We never had any. They still have some in the Mediterranean. They would stay far enough away from us. There've been enough incidents and I know enough from other people who have been on other ships who had incidents with the Russians that sometimes the American ships wouldn't stop; they would come in their path. They'd just keep going and the Russians would move usually at the last minute.

C: Was speculation that these ships were there basically for a reconnaissance or intelligence purpose?

G: Most of us knew what they were there for. At least, I had one friend that used to work in their intelligence so I used to talk to him a lot. Their primary purpose was monitor all our radio traffic and as a photographic and observation. So we understood what they were there for and we knew what we were there for.

C: John, I'd like to move now from the war itself into another area and that's reflections on the war. We've discussed how long you were there and some of the things you did. How did you feel about the war itself and what you were doing?

G: I would have to say with all honesty and sincerity that I really had no opinion before I went in. I would assume I was probably along with the other 98 percent of them who were for it. Why, I don't know. It was just the American stigma, I guess.

In fact, I still remember when I was at Kent State before I left school up there. There was a demonstration up there because the United States was bombing, that is, retaliatorial bombing a few of the North Vietnamese ports. And there were maybe a half-dozen people that were demonstrating against it. This was at Kent State, and it's something to see the contrast between--this was in the spring of 1965--just before I left, and to see what happened five years later--the complete opposite.

When I was over there, I had no opinion; no opinion for the war or no opinion against it. Well, I was probably more for it than anything else I would say, mostly because of the fact of being actually removed from it. When I got out, it was completely the opposite, for the fact of going back to school and doing nothing but sitting and talking to a lot of other ones who had been over there and to see what had gone on.

After awhile, it started to bother me. In fact, it took me about a year to readjust from some of that because it's changed me considerably. We went from one end of the American idea almost to the other end. To categorize myself, I think maybe as much as possible, is to be a pacifist, if you can use that word. To be a true pacifist is very difficult but I've learned now from actually being through one, what war is and what it does, and have been fortunate enough to be in the university now and to be able to read a great deal and coming to one conclusion: that after five thousand years of recorded history, warfare hasn't done any good except to kill a lot of people.

C: You think then the war was a waste? It was worthwhile?

G: It was extremely beneficial to me from the fact of seeing something in the standpoint of warfare and what a society can actually do and the technology that man can amass to kill somebody else.

It was bad from the standpoint of the fifty thousand that we lost, at least, in combat. The only thing that really ever bothers me is I've seen some of the TV shows and seen some of the ones that are paraplegic or quadriplegic that no longer are in one whole due to that war or due to some accident from the Vietnamese.

In reflection, in retrospect, yes, it has been of extreme benefit to find out that warfare doesn't solve anything because it's completely changed me.

C: Do you think that My Lai has taught the American people anything?

G: No, I don't think so. From all that I have read from that I really don't know and I don't think anybody will ever know whether that was deliberate. I think I was fortunate enough from being in school at that time with enough veterans that things like that do happen. If it was actually premeditated, that's one story. If it was an accident, that's something else. It could be one or two ways; I don't know.

Has it taught anybody a lesson? No, I don't think so, because I know when I worked in the mills while I was going to school when I got out of the service, that I have learned from a lot of ones that were in World War II that the same thing happened. It was never publicized. The only ones that knew about it were those people that were involved with it or who heard about it directly.

C: Do you think that Calley was a scapegoat?

G: It's hard to say. Knowing the service as I do now, I would probably say Calley was a scapegoat, yes, and I think some of the senior officers got off of it or got out of it without getting hurt. Some of them had to resign, which was punishment for them; but the armed services, I have found out, is like a lot of other corporations or institutions. They will do everything

to protect the institution itself, and they will protect the "ring clankers"--commissioned officer--from West Point, so therefore, Calley was the one that suffered. The rest of them were all ring clankers from West Point and they weren't going to bother them.

But, a cover-up is one thing. If he was actually guilty of mass murder, that's something else. If it was deliberate, that's one story. But if it was by accident, from reading and talking to other ones who were actually ground pounders who were involved in situations like that, it could have been for self-defense; I don't know. Nobody will ever know except for him and the ones who survived it.

C: I have two final questions, John. One, again, is a little of a more controversial nature and then I have a final question. First, amnesty. What's your feeling on amnesty now, having looked back at the war, having gone through it yourself, having seen what it does to people and what it's still doing to some people?

G: To make a final and absolute decision, I would have to go back through and read the history books. If amnesty has been granted to personnel in other wars, in other words, from World War II, from the First World War, et cetera, back, there's no reason not to allow amnesty for this war. They've given partial amnesty if you want to call it that.

It all depends, if there's a certain legal requirement and then there's your philosophical background, and I'm looking at more from the philosophical background.

I really don't know. I see no reason why those guys shouldn't come back. In all honesty, I have a great deal of respect for them. It took an awful lot of courage and an awful lot of guts to take off and leave this country and to go either to Canada or go to Sweden or go someplace else and not go to the war, that is, provided they did it on a moral conscientious objection, objectionable grounds, and not as some of them who I've heard from. They just didn't want to go because they didn't want to face up to military service. It was nothing.

They just didn't want any part of it, not due to the fact that it was a war, it was just the fact they didn't want to get drafted. To repeat again, I do have a great deal of respect for a lot of those ones that did go to Canada because they were conscientious objectors. They did not want to go to war and they didn't want to kill anybody or did not want to have anything to do with it.

It's hard to judge somebody by that. In other words, you can say we are going to give amnesty to those people, but how many of them took off and left because they didn't want our loyalty. They just didn't want anything to do with it.

C: It's a difficult question, I know.

G: I would have to read the history books first to see what they say.

C: As sort of a final question, although there's never really any final question in anything like this, reflecting upon your own experience now, just your own experience, what's your overall feeling about it? In other words, would you do it again? What's your overall impression? What do you still carry with you from your experience?

G: If I had to do it over again, I don't know. Hindsight is always better than foresight, so it's very difficult to say. I really don't know. When I was inducted into the service, that is, enlisted to keep from getting drafted, there were very few resisters. There were very few people who refused to serve on conscientious grounds. I don't know.

Again, to go back, I was very fortunate in what I did, mostly because of the fact I came back in one piece. It's taught me a lot, actually what warfare is and what it can be. Unfortunately I'd say it's a waste, but nobody has seemed to learn that in five thousand years of history and so we continue to repeat their mistakes again.

It taught me a lot in the fact of how far I can actually push myself, in other words, how little sleep can I go on, how much work I can do, and how little food I can go on: How far I can push

myself, in those terms.

It was of benefit in the fact of having responsibilities and the fact of being in charge of various operations and having people work for me. You can get in the leadership experience, if you want to put it that way. It's been of immense benefit.

I found that it's much harder to give orders than it is to follow them. It's much easier to do what somebody tells you than to sit down and figure out what has to be done and how to persuade people to do it. Telling somebody to do something isn't doing it correct. All you're going to do is get across to them that you have authority and authority doesn't accomplish too much. I don't know. There's a lot of other things that I have thought about.

I don't know. I haven't thought about too much of it lately. I would sort of think because there are not that many veterans down in school. We don't hang around together much more because most of them that I knew have graduated and moved now. There's really not too much, like war stories that go around anymore. Consider the greater majority of us that are down there now are in the great minority.

If you mention anything about it to any of the ones that are down in school now, they look at you because they were in high school or some of them were in junior high school when we were over there. They have no comprehension or a comprehension, period, of what it was because they were in high school. I really don't know what else I could add to it.

C: Thank you, John, for sharing your experiences with us, and if there's anybody else you might know that has also gone to the war and is at the university, I'd appreciate finding out who it is and maybe we could talk to him. Thank you very much for your time today.

END OF INTERVIEW