

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Project

Air Force Experience

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HAZLE WOODARD, JR.

Interviewed

by

Jeffery Collier

on

May 31, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: HAZLE WOODARD, JR.

INTERVIEWER: Jeffery Collier

SUBJECT: schooling, training, Air Force travel, personal views, Vietnamese people, military

DATE: May 31, 1975

C: This is Jeff Collier from the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. I am interviewing Hazle Woodard, Jr. at his apartment at 410 Kendis Circle in Youngstown, Ohio. The date is May 31, 1975, and the time is approximately 2:00 p.m.

Could you tell me a little about yourself as far as your education, where you were born and raised, and things such as that?

W: I was born in Helena, Arkansas, but I spent most of my life here in Youngstown ever since I was about five years old. I was raised on the east side. I went to Lincoln Grade School for only one year. Then I went to Elm Street School, which is now a part of Youngstown State. Then I went to East High and graduated from there. I went one semester at YSU (Youngstown State University); then I joined the military service, the Air Force.

C: What year did you graduate from high school?

W: In 1962.

C: You are not presently married?

W: No.

C: And you are presently employed by?

W: Xerox Corporation.

C: What do you do at Xerox?

W: I am a service representative for them.

C: How long have you been at Xerox?

W: It's going on three years.

C: After you got out of high school and had gone to Youngstown for one semester, you went into the military service. What branch did you go into?

W: I went into the Air Force.

C: Could you tell me the dates on that and also give me some of the specifics on your training that you went through and things such as that?

W: I joined the Air Force in May of 1964. I went to Lackland Air Force Base for basic training for about eight months, I believe. Then I went to Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi for technical training and aircraft radio repair. That lasted about thirty-three weeks. Then my first basic assignment was in California at Travis Air Force Base.

C: After you were assigned to Travis, what did you do there?

W: It was mainly on the job training for aircraft radio repair and I worked on the military cargo planes there.

C: Did you feel that you were pretty well trained after going through forty-six weeks of training?

W: Thirty-three weeks. It was pretty much the technical side of it. At Travis, you started to get your hands on the equipment type of training, seeing how it was in the aircraft, learning locations, learning how they wanted you to do it in the military. It was mostly flight line training. I went through most of that. I had some in shop training plus the training in school for in shop work. You really get familiar with the equipment on the line and you start to gain confidence in yourself.

C: What did the basic training entail?

W: You learned to drill together. You learned to do things the Air Force way. You learned the brief history of the Air Force, what they expected of you, the code of conduct, a little bit of rifle training, a little physical fitness--quite a bit of physical fitness. It's really to shape you into a military type of environment: learning to work together on command,

to take orders, to do things the military way.

- C: When you got to Travis, what type of . . . You got with the hands on type of training. I guess you were through your training then. You were more or less getting down to the actual working of the . . .
- W: Right. I was not yet working alone. You sort of worked with someone who had been working on the equipment before. You picked up pointers and watched how it was done. Then he let you get in to it and do it, and he supervised you doing it. It was more of getting a feel for the equipment, getting a feel of the aircraft, and gaining confidence in yourself.
- C: What type of aircraft were you working on?
- W: Oh, there were very many types: the old C-124, C-133, C-47, and then the newer 141's came in; I worked on those. I was one of the first ones to work on them when they first came out. I think Travis was one of the first bases that got them--and anything else that happened to come through.
- C: How long were you at Travis Air Force Base?
- W: Approximately a year.
- C: You continued to work on the planes and things there. Were you pretty proficient after a year?
- W: I was where I could work on my own, but I wasn't really capable of doing a whole lot by myself. I spent most of my time on flight line. Someone could send me out on a job, I could test the equipment, find out what was wrong with it, replace the bad equipment, and bring the bad one back to the shop to be repaired. I could work more or less on my own in that phase of it, but I wasn't really proficient on the shop type work where I could go into a shop and repair the equipment myself.
- C: After the year at Travis, where was your next duty assignment?
- W: I was assigned to Vietnam at that time to Bien Hoa Air Force Base there in Vietnam. That was in March of 1966.
- C: Could you go through what you went through in terms of leaving Travis and getting to Vietnam, your feelings and things such as that?
- W: Well, I was a little apprehensive, but I was also a little excited. It was my first time going overseas, leaving the United States. I had heard about Vietnam; I hadn't been

there, I hadn't traveled very much in my lifetime. Since I had been in the Air Force, I did most of the traveling that I had ever done. I had been on an airplane for the first time, after I had joined the service. I was sort of looking forward to it, to find out exactly what it was all about. I was a little bit apprehensive because it was a fighting type of thing, and I had never been into combat. I had never been shot at or anything or shot at anyone. I really didn't know what to expect. It was something I was looking forward to.

- C: When you left Travis Air Force Base, where did you go to? Did you leave out of San Diego or did you fly straight. . .
- W: We flew right out of Travis. I think most of the departures going to Vietnam flew out of Travis during that time. I had had a short leave at home--to visit the folks and so forth--and then I had to return to Travis. We departed from Travis and stopped at Hawaii, and I think we went to Japan. No, I'll have to change that. We took the northern route; we went up to Alaska then through Japan and down to Saigon in Vietnam. I went through the paper work there in Saigon; I spent the night in Saigon, then transferred up to Bien Hoa the next day.
- C: When you flew into Saigon, were there any expectations that you had at that time as far as what it would look like or anything like that? Was it any different than you expected?
- W: It was all new to me because I hadn't seen any pictures of it. I hadn't been anywhere overseas. The people were different; I was surprised how small in stature they were. My eyes were wide open. It was like being in a big city for the first time. It was something new and I wanted to see everything and everything was amazing to me. The sounds were different, the sites were different, the smell was different. The heat was really something else. It took some getting used to. The humidity was high, and it was really hot all of the time. You would walk around feeling muggy all of the time. It was something I had to adjust to over a period of time. Everything was just new. I wasn't apprehensive then; I was just wondering. I would look around in wonder and amazement, trying to take everything in at once. It was something new and I was glad to be there.
- C: When you flew in, was it summertime, was that why it was so hot?
- W: I think so. I think it was during their summertime. Of course, it is warm over there all of the time, not just during the summer. I guess during the summer it's worse. I think in

the winter they had their rainy season, what they call their monsoon season. You get quite a bit of rain then. But they had this hot, humid climate all the time.

C: When you flew into Saigon then and you landed there, you said processing. What did you have to go through?

W: You had to go through in-processing. They show your orders that you were assigned there, where you were assigned to. They would process your paper work, your records, get you ready to go to your new base of assignment in your unit--I guess forward your papers. You just sort of spent the night there; it was just like a transition there, a stopover, because the plane didn't go directly to your base of assignment. Everybody came into that one place, they were processed, and then they were scattered out through Vietnam to wherever their base assignment was. That was the big incoming and outgoing center.

C: Had you known before you flew over there that you were going to be assigned to Bien Hoa?

W: Yes. I had orders there. They didn't send you anywhere without orders. You had to take military flight. I had my orders there. I was assigned to Bien Hoa, but I wasn't assigned to any specific unit.

C: When you spent the night in Saigon, was there a time that you were with any other military personnel from any other branches?

W: Oh, yes. All the military personnel--the Army, the Navy, the Marines--flew into Saigon on military charter flights. We were all processed through the processing center there. We were put in what they called transit quarters. You spent the night; you might have been in the barracks with Army, Marines, Navy, or Air Force guys. It didn't really matter. Everybody was just military there in transition into Vietnam.

C: Were any of the other people that you happened to be stationed with upset? Was there any apprehension on the other parts that you noticed?

W: It was good-natured kidding. The guys in the Army weren't looking forward to going out into the jungle looking for anybody, and I don't think they were too happy about being there. But, at that time, it was good-natured talking about it. No one really showed out and out fear of anything. We were just getting used to it. I think everybody was like I was--it was something new to them and we were getting used to

things, looking around, seeing what things were like. We didn't know what to expect but we were sort of trying to take each thing that came, a step at a time.

C: Did you fly the next morning or the next afternoon?

W: It was sometime during the next day.

C: When you flew to Bien Hoa and you landed there, what were your feelings at that time? Was that any different than flying into Saigon?

W: Yes, because I got to see, I think for the first time, what I thought then was a real military base. It was like fighters, the first time I had seen fighters geared anywhere to fight. There were lots of those. There were revampments to prevent damage to the aircraft while they were parked if the place was rocketed or bombed. Everything was set up in a military situation. Everything was camouflaged; military aircrafts were all camouflaged. It was an actual military setup. I had seen it for the first time. I wasn't a civilian anymore, you weren't in the United States anymore. You were actually away from home and you were in a military situation where things were set up for war. It was a different side of the military that I had never seen before.

Like I said, I was just looking around taking everything in. There were tents or huts; they were built up with wood insides with screens on them, open sides, and tents covering over top or shingle covering, aluminum covering the top--different types of hatches there. The guys were sleeping in bunk beds. Because of the weather type conditions, they were open air like. They had wood up along the side flats and screens to keep the bugs out, but air could blow right through the place.

I was moved into my assigned barracks and checked into what squadron I was going to be in. I moved into the barracks, was given a bunk to sleep in, a locker to put my stuff in, and a chance to eat, clean up, and look around a little bit. Then I started processing into the outfit through the recruiting office here--meeting the first shirt, meeting the first sergeant, that is. They called them first shirts then. He introduced me around, took me over to the shop where I was going to work. The people there, the supervisor at the shop, he took over and showed me around the shop. They assigned me to someone who was on the flight line to go out and show me the aircraft, to see what I was going to be. It was just becoming familiar with my job then.

C: What type of aircraft were you going to be working on over

there in Vietnam?

W: They were F-100 fighters. That was mainly what I was working on there.

C: Were all the planes at your base right there all F-100's or did you have cargo planes in there or a little bit of everything?

W: In the section that I was working in. . . It was a pretty big base. The section that I was working in was F-100 fighters. Also, they had a section where the Vietnamese Air Force was located. And there was another section where the cargo planes came into and people arriving landed in that area. It was divided. There were different sections of the base. I was in the fighter section.

C: Did the Vietnamese Air Force also use F-100's?

W: No, they were using propeller type jobs: A-1-E's, A-1-H's type of aircraft. They were propeller driven, single or double seater, fighter bombers, the older, slower model aircraft.

C: Why would they be flying those? Do you know why?

W: I think mainly because the Vietnamese were just thrust into the Twentieth Century. They weren't used to sophisticated equipment; in the short of time they had to learn to fly and use the equipment. That was basically, I think, the best that they could handle because the Twentieth Century just sort of moved in on them. When we moved over there with all of our equipment, this was something that they had never had before. They didn't have an Air Force before we took over and trained them. They were familiar with rifles and things but our equipment was from the Twentieth Century, moving into basically a farming type of country. I don't think they were quite up to handling the 100's. Then, too, they were small in stature and 100's take a little bit more manpower to handle, I think. They flew helicopters and the propeller driven planes, but they were like the basic airplanes. Starting off, if you learn to fly, you start with the basics, then you work up. Before I left Vietnam, they did move into a jet aircraft, the smaller F-5 type of airplane. They had pilots flying those. When I first got there, they were mainly using propeller driven jobs.

C: When you were over there, was the Air Force training those people at your base in terms of flying other aircrafts? Did you also train or did the Air Force personnel also train the Vietnamese in other planes?



- W: No. The Vietnamese went to the United States to train for flying on the aircraft. Also, they were sent to the United States to learn to repair the equipment. When I was in technical school, we had Vietnamese guys come over there from the Vietnamese Air Force going through school also to learn the equipment that they had to repair. So all the training was done in the United States, and they were sent back over there after they had finished training. I imagine while I was there, the guys who were going to fly were in the United States at that time probably learning fighter flying.
- C: Is that because you didn't have the facilities over there? Is that why they would train them?
- W: Well, we were basically there. We didn't have the time or the facilities to train them there. We were there to maintain equipment that we were using and to make sure that they were in condition to fly because we were flying missions everyday, all day, and through the night in support of ground operations that were going on. The Vietnamese also flew in support of ground operations. That was what we were all there for, to actually carry out the missions that everyone had been trained for. The training was done in the States, and this was the end result; we were there to do it. So I don't think we had the facilities or the time to train them while they were there.
- Of course, they did have some American supervisors or American counselors there, I imagine, to help them anytime they had any problems. I never did work in a Vietnamese shop, but I've seen American guys who worked with the Vietnamese there. Mainly, they had their section of the base and we had our section. Of course, you would transit through and go to either one of them.
- C: When you were working on the F-100's, did you feel that you were qualified? With all of your training and things like that, had it brought you up to the point that you could work effectively on all the products? Was the military training really good?
- W: I think they trained me well for the job that I was doing. It was always a continuous type of training things. We were going through what we called OJT, on the job training. We were still getting book study; we were studying books on our own time, and we took tests while we were working on the aircraft also. You would go during the day and work on the aircraft and in the evenings we worked on our books. Then sometimes during the day our supervisors would bring us in and we would take tests on books that we were studying.

Anytime we had any problem with anything we could always ask someone, our supervisor or someone else that knew. It was a continuous training thing. It wasn't like we just got there and were put on our own. You were working on your own, sort of, but then you always knew that you could ask someone if you ran into something that you didn't know or a situation that you weren't sure of.

I think for the job we were doing I was trained properly. As a matter of fact, I took a three level test while I was there. When you are finished with your OJT, you finish all of your book studies, you take an Air Force test to gain a three level in your skill that you are in. At the time I was a two striper and to advance any further, I had to pass this test for the five level. I was a three level at the time. After training and graduating from tech school, you became a three level; then you were trained for a five level. After you gained your five level, then you could advance up in rank from there, from a two striper. So I passed that while I was there.

C: How many people, as far as American personnel in the Air Force, were situated at Bien Hoa when you were there?

W: I have no idea. There were a lot of Americans there. I would say thousands. It was not only in the Air Force; it would be Army all around. Army was situated around our base.

C: Could you describe the way the base was set up? The Air Force was sort of in the middle, was that the way it was?

W: No. The base was a very large base.

C: When you say very large, how big, twenty-five miles square, ten miles?

W: Maybe about ten or twenty miles coverage. We had the living quarters in one section of the base, and the Vietnamese had their living quarters in one section. We had a very long runway and even commercial planes started coming in there later on after I had been there awhile. We began to process people in and out of Bien Hoa instead of Saigon because it was becoming overcrowded after they started building up the Americans there--sending more Americans. After the buildup started, they began to process them from Bien Hoa also. So it was a pretty long runway so that it could handle jet type of commercial aircraft.

Actually there were two runways. There wasn't just the one. In one section of the working area, the flight line area, as it is called where the airplanes are parked and take off from. . .

The larger section the Americans used; then there was a smaller section where the Vietnamese had their Air Force. They used the same runway, but they did have their sections where they parked their aircrafts and their maintenance was taken care of. It might have been bigger than twenty miles; it might have been closer to twenty-five or thirty miles area there. I have no exact figures on how big it was. It was the largest base I had seen. I think it was bigger than Travis.

C: When you say the Americans had living quarters in one section, were the Army and other branches of the service all together there or was it just the Air Force personnel?

W: Just Air Force personnel. The Army had their own camp set up away from there. They were out in some other part of Vietnam. They were around on our base though. They patrolled and guarded the section of the jungles around the base to protect the base from being infiltrated. Also, we had our own security guards; the air police had their own security patrols inside the base fence. Then the Vietnamese had their security patrols out too around the base, so we were pretty well protected.

The Army personnel came on base to shop or to come to the airman's social club there, the NCO. The social club was a bimilitary club where anybody military could come to have a beer and socialize a while and just generally relax. Also, we had a BX or a commissary store that they could shop in. As a matter of fact, the Koreans shopped on our base also and socialized if they wanted to. They would have access for all military personnel to come on and shop or go to the social club or anything.

C: If you were on the inside of the base and the Army has a perimeter set up around you to protect the airplanes and stuff, is that why it was set up like that?

W: No, not exactly in that situation. The fence and the perimeter of the immediate base were patrolled and guarded by Air Force sentry people. We had guard dogs, air policemen, and they took care of that. There was a small Army unit stationed on the base to take care of a missile site that they had on a hill on the other side of the runway. They had a small missile site that was encompassed inside the area of the base. But then the big Army operations were carried on further outside of the base; Big Red 1 and some other units were out there. They carried on operations in the jungle to keep the area secured around Bien Hoa city and Bien Hoa Air Base to keep the Vietnamese, the VC, at bay and keep them from making any type of major offenses against the base.

The air police and our security guards were to keep small groups from infiltrating the base and maybe setting charges on some of the planes and things. We were not exactly under the command of the Army or the guardianship of the Army; they carried on operations around the base to protect the base.

The Army was always carrying on operations throughout Vietnam; they had their units stationed all over Vietnam. We came under one. Maybe we were under section three, I think. Maybe they had a unit there, a command post--a big operation somewhere under unit three they were to put that Bien Hoa Air Base plus the surrounding areas, carry on operations, hunt VC and things like this there.

C: You said that the Koreans would also shop?

W: Yes. The Koreans were one of the allied units there. The Koreans were there and I think Thais had a unit there; the Australians had a unit in Vietnam. These were some of the people that I had seen there. I saw Koreans and Australians and I had seen Thai troops come on base and shop through our BX. They were also somewhere out in the jungle, carrying on their operations too, I would imagine. We were pretty well under protection; I felt pretty safe from any type of major offensive. There was always the worry of some small units sending in infiltrators, but our base security was pretty good. As far as I know, while I was there no infiltrators got in to damage anything on base. After I left there in March of 1967, they did hit the base with long range rockets from out of the jungle. But while I was there, I don't believe they did get in.

C: What about the rocket base that you said they had there, was that also Air Force controlled?

W: No. The Army controlled it, but they were within the perimeter of the base, so I imagine our security patrol sort of patrolled around that area too. I imagine they had their own little sentry setup out there also. It was controlled mainly by the Army though; it was an Army missile site.

C: You made two distinctions between the base and the city of Bien Hoa. How big was the city?

W: It was a fair sized little place. It was bigger than the village. They had brick buildings, a downtown area, a market place, and movie theaters. It was open at that time. After duty, the GI's could go down, walk around, and look around Bien Hoa city. I imagine it was a fair sized little place. It wasn't as big as Saigon, but it was, I think, maybe one of the biggest little towns or cities in Vietnam.

C: How big was Saigon?

W: Oh, Saigon was like, well, I think, they called it the Paris of Vietnam. It was a really hustling, bustling city. It would be a city to American standards. I didn't get to look around Saigon because I was just transferred in and didn't have a chance to go downtown or anything; they weren't allowing us to go downtown. Then I was shipped the next day up to Bien Hoa and I looked around Bien Hoa city.

C: How far was Bien Hoa from Saigon? How long did it take you to get there by plane?

W: Via plane, maybe an hour. It was maybe about sixty or seventy miles, within that radius of Saigon, not very far because in a couple of hours you could drive down there in a truck. I imagine flying it was only maybe a half of an hour, so it wasn't that far.

C: When you were in Bien Hoa, when the people would go into town, was there anything that stood out in your mind when you made the comparison that Saigon was like an American city? Bien Hoa, perhaps being a smaller town or smaller city than Saigon, was there anything that stands out in your mind that was different than you would see over here on the street or that you noticed or remember that was outstanding?

W: Yes, quite a bit. It was a city because it had big buildings, but the streets were not paved. The people lived in shanties or huts compared to American standards--no indoor plumbing. They had ditches running along side of the road to carry off the drainage. People had farms right around in the city with farm animals running around. You would be quite surprised. It was like a country town actually, unpaved streets, very inadequate housing according to American standards, but I imagine they were pretty good according to the Vietnamese standards. The unsanitary conditions were close at hand. I think their plumbing situation was none to very little. You couldn't get hot water too readily even on the base. Hot water was a premium.

The people were different; they were smaller in stature. They dressed differently. The language was different. It was just all very new to me and I tried to see as much as I could. I tried to understand the people and I tried to pick up some of the language to be able to communicate with the people and to find out what they were really like. You heard that the people were unfriendly or you had to watch out for VC all of the time, but I found this to be untrue. The people were friendly when you tried to be friendly towards them. They were just ordinary people, mainly farmers, trying to make

the best of it.

The fighting in Vietnam, I believe, had been going on ever since the French were there and probably before that. They were used to war and were just trying to make the best of it. I felt sorry for the little people because they were the ones who were really caught in it. The little farmer out there tending his rice patty, that was his most important thing and he was caught in between everything--between the government troops coming in telling him what he should do and what he must do, and the Viet Cong coming in when they (the government) left telling him what he better do. He was caught in the middle and didn't have any place to turn; he was just out trying to survive. That's the way it was generally with the people there; everybody was just trying to survive and make the best of it.

C: So you thought the people were pretty friendly?

W: If you made an effort to be friendly towards them, they were friendly towards you. You could go into a restaurant to eat fried rice or something like that. Quite a few of them, people that served GI's all the time, learned English, enough to get by, and they were always courteous and cordial and had a very good sense of humor. They were used to Americans taking pictures of them all the time, and they would pose for anyone who wanted to take a picture of them. I guess every GI there wanted a picture of Vietnamese and they were getting used to it, I imagine. Americans probably would resent the imposition on them after awhile. But the people knew that we were there to help them and I found that the Vietnamese people, as a matter of fact any people overseas, were friendly depending on your attitude toward them.

I became fond of the Vietnamese people; I sympathized with their situation. If I had to stay there everyday of my life, I don't know how I would feel. I knew I just had a year's time to put in there and I could leave. I only had a short time to put up with whatever I had to put up with there and I could look forward to going back to "the land of good and plenty." The most common basic things of life were hard to get. You were lucky to get the necessities. You learned to appreciate the United States while you were there because, as I said, things like hot water, clean water were a premium there. Cold beer was a premium. If you got cold beer, that was a luxury.

On base, they tried to make you feel at home. They had movies and they would try to give you popcorn for the movies. They tried to give you cold beer whenever they could. Sometimes they would run out of beer and you would have to settle

for pop, and sometimes they would run out of pop and you would have to settle for water. The foods and the chow hall, they tried to give you as close as to what you were used to in the United States as they could. A lot of the food was powdered or dry, dried milk and powdered eggs, things like that. You really began to appreciate what you had here at home, being an American. When you saw what the other side had to put up with, you realized how lucky you were. Unfortunately, all the Americans didn't see it that way, but I, myself, began to appreciate my situation.

C: How far away was Bien Hoa base versus Bien Hoa city?

W: Oh, right outside the fence. You would walk right out the gate. As a matter of fact, civilians from Bien Hoa city came in and worked on base. One of the luxuries the GI's had over there was housemaids to take care of the hutches that we lived in, hutch maids. They came in, swept up, polished our shoes, picked up our laundry, took it home, washed it, and brought it back the next day. All you had to do was get up and get dressed. That was one of the biggest things I liked about being overseas, also, in the military.

You didn't have to put up with the inspections; you didn't have to make your bed if you didn't want to; you didn't have to do anything. You got up and had your shoes polished there, waiting; you had clean laundry there. You got up, dressed, and walked out. You knew when you came back that evening that the maid had already swept out the place, the bed was already made, and everything was nice and comfortable. It was luxury to us; we lived like kings there.

As far as the location outside of the main gate. . . They had several gates that any Vietnamese employee had to go through to get to certain areas of the base. Each area of the base had a small gate and security check in that you had to get through. The American section had their little gate that they had to check in. There was the main gate to get on to the base. The Vietnamese section had their gate; the Army section had their gate, and sometimes they would have an intermediate gate somewhere or checks to go through. So it wasn't easy if they wanted to sneak a bomb or something in to the base. It wasn't that easy to get in on it. All the people who worked there had a pass and that pass was checked every time they went to or from the base. They had their picture on the base and their records were kept on the base.

I didn't have any qualms about people working on the base, anybody sneaking a grenade under my bed or anything. We even

joked about it, but we felt pretty confident. They were screened pretty good. Outside of the main gate you could catch a lambreta which was like a Vietnamese bus. It was a three wheeled motorcycle with a box on the back for people to sit on. You could run right downtown; it was within walking distance of the main gate.

C: Was the VC very active in this area?

W: Oh, the VC was active everywhere. I mean, during the day, the government may have controlled things, but during the evening the VC ran things. I imagine there were VC infiltrators in Saigon and Bien Hoa cities. I imagine they were keeping an eye on the base, probably reporting the number of take-offs and landings and things like this. I don't think the people knew or they didn't tell who they were; maybe they did and maybe the Army intelligence might have known.

The city was open; you went downtown; you didn't have to worry about getting shot at or anything because there were too many GI's there. The Army was always in town, the American Air Force was always in town, the Vietnamese Army was always in town. As a matter of fact, the Army headquarters was there in Bien Hoa city. It was relatively safe, you didn't have to worry about looking over your shoulder or anything. Of course, they didn't allow you to stay off base after dark because then you would have to worry. But during the day, everything was relatively safe.

C: When you were on the base, when you talked about infiltrators, was there ever a VC infiltrator caught on the base?

W: I've heard rumors that there were some caught, but I never for a fact saw any. Like I said, my job was relatively working on the flight line, and the security police took care of the security. They never made a point of broadcasting or telling everything that went on. Everything was sort of secretive, and if they were caught or anything you just heard it by word of mouth or rumor. It could have been made up or it could have been true. There were always rumors about something going on. There were rumors that we were going to get hit, rumors that they were going to make a push on the base or things like this--things to keep the excitement going on, to keep you from getting bored. A lot of it was made up and maybe some of it was fact; so I really couldn't tell.

C: In terms of any incoming ground fire or attack or anything like that, what would you have to do at the base?

W: Well, if they did come to the point of attacking the base, then on base there were located bunkers for people to go to



in case of an attack. They were sandbag bunkers to protect them from rockets and mortar shells. The lower ranking airmen, myself included, had an extra duty to do, perform, as well as our regular work. We took time out to train with the air police as to what positions to take up and where to go in case of an attack. We had the duty of supplementing the air police.

C: If you were ever attacked, would you have enough time to take and get your weapons and get into the field? It would seem to me that by not issuing you the rifles, the M-16's, that it would take too much time to pick those up and get to your bunkers and things before you would be attacked.

W: The reason we didn't have the M-16's with us and they were in a central location was because previously, I think, they had had an attack at another base where too many guys were hurt by people in excitement, shooting at other people running around, thinking that the VC was already on base. This could easily happen on an attack at night; people are running for the bunker and during the excitement, not knowing that the other Americans are still out there, they could start shooting at anything that moved. That's why we had to turn our weapons over into a central location.

We weren't the primary base security; they always had air policemen out there. We were like a secondary backup, like they were really on the base, over-running everything else and just getting close to the flight line to the airplanes and everything. We were under initial attack, and they would sound the siren, and the air police would already be going into position and we were to pick up our weapons and take up positions just behind the air police. If they got through the air police, then we were next, and after us it would be the airplanes. So we were like the last resort.

C: In terms of working on the aircraft, did you get to talk to the pilots when they flew in after missions and things such as that?

W: No, I didn't. When they first came in, they would talk to their crew chiefs and tell them what was wrong with the airplane, write in the aircraft record log what was wrong. Then the logs would be turned into the maintenance control, which would write up the work orders for communications, which was our department. The work order would be sent over and then we would pick up the work order and go out to the aircraft that had the problem and pull the equipment off. Sometimes we would talk to the crew chiefs. By the time we got there the pilots had left and were somewhere else. We would talk to the crew chief and if he had talked to the

pilot then we would hear what he had heard and maybe he would tell us and maybe he would add to it or take from it; we just picked up mainly rumors. We never had first-hand information very often.

- C: In relation to the fighting and things like that, whether it be in the NCO club or downtown in Bien Hoa or in other locations where you would take and talk to military personnel who were actually in the field fighting, what was the general attitude of the people? Were people excited over there? Were they unhappy that they were there? Did they think that the Vietnamese could hold their own, not hold their own, things like that?
- W: Well, since you mentioned the NCO club and downtown, that's where we picked up most of our best stories and best information, from places like that, guys who had been there. The Army guys really had it the roughest. We were mainly on base, we didn't have to go looking for anyone. They were the ones who had to go out in the bush and look about for someone, beat the bush for them. I think the general attitude of the Army was the guys didn't like the idea because it was a new type of war; it wasn't a conventional type of war. This was like guerrilla warfare, and you had to be careful where you stepped, how much noise you made. You never knew where the next VC might pop up from. The Army had gained respect for the VC. For the limited ability that he had, he was good; the VC could take a pouch of rice and a weapon and hold off the United States Army. This was where he had gained some respect with the Army.

The general consensus was that they didn't like to be there. There were a few gung ho guys who just wanted to go out and hunt VC, but generally the guys didn't like going out and didn't like being there, but they were doing their job.

It had different effects on each person. I imagine each individual had his own way of looking at things, whether he was scared or not, whether they were doing right or wrong. Whether it was the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do, they didn't know; the low ranking guy, all he knew was that he was doing his job. He had to go out and kill to keep from being killed, and to look for VC when he had to and to kill VC because he had to. It was just a matter of surviving to him.

I don't think they felt that the Vietnamese Army was capable of holding things on their own. I think that general consensus was right because after we left there, things began to deteriorate for them. After we pulled out our help, they lost the whole thing, which is history now. Also, I

don't think anyone wanted to be there, but were there because they had to be. The VC, whether he was the right guy to fight or the wrong guy to fight, I have my own opinions about it and everyone has their own opinion about it.

I think my attitude from talking to guys was that we weren't doing this thing the right way; if we were there to fight this war, we should have fought it as a war and got it over with. The situation was to go out and control the VC which was nearly impossible, in my opinion, and to just deter them from taking over certain areas. It was the wrong way of doing things; we were just wasting our time, which I think history has proven. We should have gone there to run the VC and the north Vietnamese out of South Vietnam and if necessary, take the war to Hanoi. I think it was like the situation in South Korea. MacArthur was only allowed to fight up to a certain line and stop. We weren't even supposed to fight up to the line; we were just supposed to clear them out of certain areas and hope they didn't come back. I think that was the general attitude of most of the guys there; it was a waste of time.

C: Did you have any fighting at all with the north Vietnamese Army in the south or was it only with the Viet Cong?

W: I didn't have any fighting at all to do there. From what I learned through news reports and rumors that were going around, the north Vietnamese had their Army infiltrated with the VC. Most of the fighting was done against the VC but I imagine the north Vietnamese Army was there as infiltrators, not as a regular Army fighting. I think that happened later on.

C: What could we have done differently from your point of view as a person in the Air Force, which, of course, gave a lot of support to the ground war and also was probably one of the controlling factors why those people never got into the south? You not only bombed trails and things like that, but the Air Force and the Navy became a major factor as the war drew on in terms of holding those people and a flood of ammunition and things like that from coming down the trails. What should we have done differently to take and win the war?

W: What we should have done was to not only hold them, but to push them out. As I said before, just take a ground war and the area that you secured, work out from there. We were just sending out Army patrols to patrol certain areas, to contact the VC, to wipe out units of the VC, and to leave the area. Then the VC would just come right back in after

you would leave. What we should have done was like in a regular war: just go in, push the enemy out of the area that you want, and keep pushing him, don't let up on him, destroy the enemy if you can, just push him out to the sea or back up to North Vietnam or wherever you had to push him.

I think the attitude of the people here at home, the Congress. . . The whole thing was that it was an undeclared war; it was an illegal war. There was doubt whether we had any commitment there at all. We weren't going to fight a war unless it was declared, and I don't think that the United States wanted to fight it as a war because it was an undeclared war.

We were using gloves with the enemy. We would go in and smack their wrists, and then we would leave. They would come back and do whatever they wanted to and we would have to go in and smack them again, instead of just going in and beating the hell out of them. This is what I think we should have done. Not only just bombing up in North and Hanoi and everything, but we should have marched up there and beaten the enemy once and for all. Then we wouldn't have had to stay there that long, and I don't think we would have had to worry about the South Vietnam being lost. That is just my personal opinion.

- C: How about the weaponry in terms of what the Air Force had over there versus what the north Vietnamese Army or the other Vietnamese Air Force had? Were our capabilities superior from your point of view? Also being in the Air Force, from what you heard from pilots, from scuttlebutt or whatever, did we have the ability to take and defeat those people with what we had over there or should we have brought in more or were they, in fact, better equipped than we were?
- W: While I was there, we were superior. The VC had no air power in South Vietnam while I was there. We controlled the air and that is why we were able to control what ground fighting we did because of air support; the ground troops relied heavily upon it. As I said, the VC had no aircraft at all south of the line. Later on they started getting these Migs from the Russians and the Chinese when we started bombing Hanoi. Even when we started bombing Hanoi, we had them outflown and everything else. The only thing, later on, we waited too long. As I said, we didn't fight a real war. They started getting missiles which became a better anti-aircraft weaponry for them. We had them outdone, outflown, out-anything than the VC. The only thing was that they were a little bit better of a guerrilla warfare fighter than we

were; but still, if we had fought it as a war, we would have beaten them.

C: Was there any flak from opposing aircraft or anything such as that when the Air Force pilots would fly?

W: They would pick up ground fire from some antiaircraft weapons, but it wasn't that much until we started flying north, I think, later on, after I had left Vietnam. While they were flying around through South Vietnam, they picked up ground fire from hand weapons and maybe some antiaircraft weapons, only when they flew low. In support of troop movements, they had to fly low and straight, so they came into range of the troops' weapons that were on the ground, weaponry itself.

As far as sophisticated weaponry, I don't think the VC had anything. They picked up weapons that we lost; they had weapons from China and Russia, but it was all hand weaponry. They didn't have any heavy weaponry at the time that I was there. They didn't have tanks, they didn't have big anti-aircraft guns, maybe a few. This was like an area that they really controlled, day and night. Other than that, we had them beaten on every prime. It's just that we couldn't take advantage of them.

C: As far as the individuals in the Air Force, what was the feeling of the Air Force personnel, notably the pilots--if you can give me any perspective there as to flying against the Viet Cong or the Vietnamese?

W: The Air Force pilot's attitude, I believe, was always positive. They took pride in their job; they tried to do it the best they could. They really took some chances in supporting ground troops. You would hear of guys flying so low that they would come back with branches of trees and things on their airplanes. The Air Force pilot was really gung ho. The pilot is a different breed of a person; he is an elite position, an elite type of fighter. He is not face-to-face most of the time with the enemy, but he takes pride in his work and he can see the result of his work. The pilot's attitude, I think, is positive. They would go out and do a job and they would do anything to get the job done right. They really took chances that you wouldn't think a guy could do with an airplane to support ground troops. Sometimes they didn't make it because guys got shot down--guys that crashed coming back in, guys that would have accidents sometimes. There weren't very many, but the chances that they took endangered them, but they still took them. I was proud of the pilots that we served for and I think they were proud of the job that they were doing. There may have been some who didn't like doing it, who didn't like flying.

Nobody likes to go out and get shot at, but they went and did it. The Air Force was pretty much proud of what they were doing.

C: How long were you in Vietnam?

W: A year.

C: Were you glad to leave?

W: I think I was because, like I said, I began to appreciate the United States more. The small things were luxuries over there--hot water, good food. Just to see Americans again. . . The guys referred to American women as "round eyes" because of the difference in the eye make-up between the Orientals and the Americans. You begin to want to see things at home again--American women, American cars--and to be able to do things that you did while you were at home. Some people were gung ho enough to extend their enlistment over there for another six months and some guys wanted to stay. I wasn't one of them. I did what I had to do while I was there and I am glad for the experience of being there, of seeing what it was like firsthand, but I didn't want to make a career of staying there. I was glad to leave. If I had to go back, I didn't want to go right away. I wasn't anxious to go back, but if I had to go, I would have gone.

C: When you flew back after leaving Vietnam, where did you go to then?

W: I came back to the States and I was stationed at Dover, Delaware, in 1967. I left Vietnam in March of 1967. I was assigned to Dover Air Force Base, Delaware.

C: How long were you at Dover?

W: I was there up until December, then I was assigned overseas to the Philippines again.

There is one thing that sort of bothered me and I guess it bothered most of the military guys overseas there in Vietnam at that time: these things that were going on here at home--the campus riots and demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, guys dodging the draft. Being of a military mind at the time, we didn't really appreciate it. I think in my opinion, it did give comfort to the enemy. He knew that the American opinion was against it and he knew that the pressure was on the Americans for being in Vietnam. I think instead of helping him to maybe think, well, we're not doing any good; the Americans are better; eventually they are going to win. They maybe were of the mind that, if we hold out long enough

the Americans are going to be forced to pull out. That's just my opinion of it.

Later on I tended to think that maybe we didn't belong there. If we did belong there, we should have gone in and done it right and gotten it over with. Hanging in there ten, long years is too much, and too long. When we did pull out, it was right back to where it had started from when we first went over there. You couldn't see where we had accomplished anything. A lot of good guys had died, and you couldn't tell for what. And eventually, it was for nothing. So I didn't like the way we went over there.

If I had an opinion that we didn't belong there, I don't think I would have rioted on campuses to show my disapproval of it; I would have voiced it, but I don't think I would have done it in such a way as to give comfort and aid to the enemy. That's just my opinion on it, but that's the way I feel about it.

C: How could the north Vietnamese derive comfort from it if they were continually being bombed by the Air Force and the Navy or continually having pressure put against them by the Army and Marines?

W: They weren't--at the time I was there--attacking North Vietnam. Mostly the fighting was being done in South Vietnam. As I said before, they realized that there was pressure in the United States working against the government to get out of Vietnam. They felt perhaps that if they hung in there long enough, that the pressure would become great enough where eventually we would have to leave Vietnam. I think that is eventually what happened.

As we hung in there too long, more and more people began to feel that it was a useless thing and I began to feel that way myself, the way we were going about it. Ten years was way too long to get a war fought and over with. Actually we weren't doing it to get it over with, we were just there to try and keep them out of South Vietnam, which was impossible, I think, the way that we were doing it.

The north Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were very determined people. They staunchly believed in what they were doing. They were fighting to free their land from others who didn't belong there or should not have controlled their country. They weren't about to give up easily and the way that we were going about trying to make them quit or give up, they weren't going to do it. And we found out after ten, long years that everybody became weary of it.

I think they derived comfort or aid by knowing that this pressure was there all of the time for us to get out of Vietnam. If they hung in there long enough, eventually we would have to leave. Later on when Jane Fonda and other Americans started going to North Vietnam and saying that they were right, that didn't do us a bit of good because we had Americans in South Vietnam fighting and dying and there were Americans in North Vietnam saying that we were right and to keep it up. That would leave a bad taste in anybody's mouth.

C: When you mentioned the commitment of the Viet Cong and the north Vietnamese people, why is it that the south Vietnamese people didn't have the same commitment?

W: It may have been that some of them were committed to try and rid their country of the north Vietnamese. As I said before, the war in Vietnam had been going on for so long. It was ten years that we were there, the time that the French were there, and perhaps before. Anybody would get sick and tired of fighting all of the time--for what? The little guy could never see where he was gaining anything out of it. They were losing all of the time; they were losing their farms, their homes, their loved ones, and they would be sick and tired of it too. It looked like a never ending war to the south Vietnamese.

C: Wouldn't it look the same to the north Vietnamese though?

W: Well, the north Vietnamese government, I imagine, felt that they were making gains here and that they would eventually win. The north Vietnamese farmer wasn't losing anything. He still had his farm. They weren't fighting in North Vietnam and he was just doing his job to support his Army and his Army was fighting in the south. Of course, they were losing their young people too in the south. I imagine a small guy there might not have wanted the war to go on as long as it did, but the pressure was more so on the south Vietnamese people than on the north, I think. If we were fighting a civil war in the United States and, say instead of the four years that it did last, it lasted ten or twenty or thirty years, eventually, I think that we would become tired of it and somebody would want to quit. As a matter of fact, somebody would probably have negotiated a settlement and we may have had two United States by now. In Vietnam, that war was not controlled by the Vietnamese. It was controlled by others than the Vietnamese.

C: When you were back in Delaware and also when you were transferred and took your new assignment in the Philippines,



did you see a change in the American attitude of the people in the Air Force in the Vietnam War? As the years went on and the fighting got tougher, more people were being killed, the pilots were being pursued by the missiles, Bien Hoa was attacked. What are your feelings?

W: I got into this more so after I left the Philippines and went to Thailand; I was stationed in Thailand and we supported the war from there more so than we did from the Philippines. I think by the time I was there, everybody in general was getting pretty well tired of this thing dragging out.

C: When were you in Thailand?

W: In 1969 and 1970. I think everybody in general was tired of it by then, but everybody continued to do their job. I think the pilots from Thailand, I know they were flying north and they were getting shot at by the missiles and all of them were getting hit. It was much tougher on them, but they knew that by putting pressure on the north Vietnamese that they were making less pressure for those in the south. They still felt that this was a job that they had to do and they still took pride in the job that they were doing.

Generally, I think everybody was just weary of it and we were wondering how much longer would we have to continue to do this. I imagine if we had to do it for twenty years more, we would still do it. Although I did notice that more and more people coming in, the younger people coming into the Air Force, had the attitude that we didn't belong there, we shouldn't be there, that things were wrong. More of the people that were on campus who were against the war were now being forced into, drafted into the service and were forced to go to either Vietnam, Thailand, or somewhere to support this war that they were basically against in the first place. The attitude that they had at home was carried into the service and was more so because they were there at it. We were just all looking, hoping for a quick end to it somehow.

C: In seeing what eventually happened there within the past six months with the fall of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and now Thailand, do you have any reflections?

W: I don't think Thailand is going to fall; I think it is a pretty stable country. Laos is going; Cambodia is gone; Vietnam is gone. I've seen the effort we were over there to do and what we did while we were there has all been futile. It's like we lost the war because we were there

fighting the war ourselves. We didn't win; we lost. Now I don't know how this is going to affect the future of these countries; maybe it will eventually be for the best because these countries will be unified and under one government and the war will finally be over. But as in any war, nobody really wins; they are all losers.

I think that the effort that we put in was wasted now. The guys who lost their lives there were wasted. I don't know if there could have been a negotiated peace in the Paris Peace Conference. It may have been just a farce to give the north Vietnamese time to restock their supplies and take advantage of the lull in the fighting. I think they were a little bit more determined than the south Vietnamese or the Democratic governments that were in power.

I think it all goes basically back to what I said before, that we weren't doing it the right way. If we were going to fight a war, we should have fought the war to win, and we weren't. You can't hold off anybody that is determined to do something forever. I think the Communist governments were determined and they were getting unlimited supplies from the other Communistic nations--Russia, China. The American people were getting tired of supplying the south Vietnamese and Cambodians. I think it was hard on us here at home and we were tired of sending our guys over there and losing them. When we cut off our supplies, the north Vietnamese and the Communistic Cambodians were still getting their supplies, it was just a matter of time before they won. They were determined to win.

It all seems to be, now, to me, a waste of our time, lives, money. We didn't gain anything from it. Maybe the future might be a little bit better eventually where people can return to their homes and maybe live without fear of losing their lives. At least the war is over finally and maybe things can settle down for the little people--the people who just want their rice patties, their farms, and a peaceful life. Finally for them, it's going to be over, hopefully.

C: Thank you.

W: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW