

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WINTER S. HESS
Ground Sensor Monitor, Army, Vietnam War
2001

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Hess, Winter S. Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 47 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 47 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 47 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Winter Hess, an Auburn, Wisconsin veteran, discusses his Vietnam War service monitoring enemy lines with the Army. He talks about getting his induction delayed until the end of deer season, basic and advanced infantry training at Fort Ord (California), officer training at Fort Sill (Oklahoma), attempting to decline a commission, being given an artillery military occupation specialty even though he demonstrated a “lack of commitment”, and ground sensor operator training school at Fort Huachuca (Arizona). As a passive ground sensor monitor, he was part of McNamara’s Line and the “Igloo White” project and he comments on the types and positions of sensors and calling artillery fire based on the sensors. Hess also mentions flying over the “I” Corps area with the Air Force, flying with Marines to drop sensors from 100 feet off the ground, and going on bombing runs with Air Force pilots to monitor sensors. Stationed at Chu Lai, he comments on being under rocket attacks and rifle fire and taking cover in fox holes. He recalls his last three months as non-commissioned officer in charge of Hawk Hill firebase’s sensor team assisting the 198th Infantry Brigade. Hess provides a detailed account of several missions including one where an engine failed, another where his plane almost flew into an Arc Light B-52 strike, and another where the pilot became lost and they ended up over the South China Sea.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001.

Transcribed by Patrick F. Gould, 2009.

Transcription checked by Channing Welch, 2009.

Transcription corrected by Katy Marty, 2009.

Abstract edited by Susan Krueger, 2009.

Interview Transcript

[Note: The audio tape is very difficult to listen to as there is a background buzz throughout and both narrator and interviewer are too far from the microphone.]

Gail: (unintelligible) that's classified (??).

Hess (?): (laughs)

Jim: Who said we're not allowed to talk about that? I thought that was classic.

Mrs. Hess (?): It was priceless he would give him the wrong size (??) It's classified. And he was also in World War I, wasn't he?

Jim: Yeah, but they wouldn't send him to this (unintelligible). They wouldn't send him to France because of his background.

Hess: Break yet?

Jim: Not yet. All right. Off and running. Talking to Winter Hess on this day the 19th – 18th –

Hess: 19th.

Jim: 18th of April. Do you know that Hawthorne's "18th of April in '75, not a man who is now alive"? Do you remember that famous day, you know, *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*. Well, you probably didn't they didn't probably have that when you were in school.

Hess: No, I missed that one.

Jim: Anyway, where were you born sir?

Hess: Evanston, Illinois.

Jim: You grew up there too?

Hess: No, the first four years there and then moved to Lake Geneva and was raised there. Lived there until, headin' off to college I guess in '62, '63.

Jim: And, uh, how did you become involved in the military?

Hess: Ah, little bit of a long story. I don't know if you want long stories.

Jim: I came all the way down here. I want all the story.

Hess: After graduation from college I was employed as a game warden. I was a State of Wisconsin – I was a trainee and during that time period, that training period, I got my induction notice and a friendly recruiter who was a friend of another game warden, ah, heard about that. And ah, said, “Geez, maybe I can help you out a little bit.” So I went and talked to that recruiter and he said that we can get your induction deferred at least through the end of deer season, and he said, “I’ll send ya, get you lined up where you can get out to California where it’s a little bit warmer than it is at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri – Just push the button. Push the (unintelligible) – and “Plus” he said, “We’ll get you a two years enlistment.” He said, “Most people don’t know there such a thing,” and he said “I’ll put you in with the Packerbackers.” He says, “They’re all guys from the Green Bay area. So, they’re all going out of Fort Ord.” (laughs) Sounds better than Ft. Leonard Wood to me. So, that’s what we did. I enlisted and he got the induction notice cancelled.

Jim: What years was that again?

Hess: Ah, that would have been in—’68 or ‘9 – ’69 I think it was.

Jim: ‘69?

Hess: Yeah (??)

Jim: You were inducted (unintelligible) draft. (unintelligible).

Hess: Right. So I went into the Army with an RA serial number which that meant good things to the lifers. The drill sergeants and all that, “Oh you’re an RA, you’re not a US.”

Jim: RA?

Hess: RA was regular Army. That’s what –

Jim: Oh, regular Army.

Hess: You got when got if you volunteered. Well, it appeared that I volunteered and if you got drafted your serial number started with US.

Jim: Right.

Hess: And so the drill sergeants and all that, “Oh hey, there’s a guy who volunteered.” (laughs)

Jim: That’s right. They’re lookin’ for you. And where did they send you for training?

Hess: Ah to Ft. Ord California. Was there for basic training and advanced infantry training. And then from there went to – well, we got two weeks leave or whatever and went to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma and again there is a long story there. Ah, the overall plan that this recruiter and I agreed upon was that I would go to OCS and ah, he insisted, “Just decline your commission when you get to that point. Just refuse the commission.”

Jim: They’d send you to OCS and then you’d say, “No”?

Hess: Yeah, and then you just refuse the commission and he said by that time you will probably have less than a years left on your two years enlistment. They probably won’t send you to Nam. They’ll probably send you to Europe or send you to the stateside or something like that, whatever.

Jim: That is amazing (??)

Hess: That was the plan. So in that context, here’s what really happened. (Jim laughs) During my leave, I decided this Army thing is not my cup of tea, you know, it’s tolerable and all that, but I have other things I’d like to do. And of course, coming out of basic training and out of AIT you’re all pumped up, you’re invincible, you’re the guy who is going to go out, kick butt, take names and all of that kind of stuff - about clearing up that issue over there.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Hess: Yeah. Absolutely so, let’s just do it and be done with it. I don’t want to go to OCS anymore. Just send me over there. I’ll do my years over there. I’ll come back and that’s the end of the story, this chapter, and I’ll go on with things. So that’s my mindset. I report to Ft. Sill and try to communicate that with people at Ft. Sill.

Jim: I can see it now: “It say’s here-[unintelligible] –“.

Hess: Yeah, “Hey, young man. You’re here, you’re mine, (both laugh) you stay.” Why would you want to waste your time on a guy that you know he’s not going to worry – well, that isn’t the Army’s way of thinking, and they say you are obliged to stay for at least eight weeks. So, here I am with my MOS is 11 Bravo. That’s the prime mover of an M-16. That’s the –

Jim: I was just going to say, how did you get that?

Hess: Well, I got that because coming out of basic and AIT, Advanced Infantry Training.

Jim: Ah, I missed that part, the advanced training.

Hess: Oh, yeah, advanced, that was at Ft. Ord also. So I come out of there with an 11 Bravo MOS, which is the prime mover of an M-16. Now, that's the worst thing you can possibly be in Viet Nam. I mean, you're the infantry grunt.

Jim: The M-16 is the standard rifle?

Hess: Oh, that's the rifle. Anyway, so there I am. That's my mindset. Just give me my gun, I am going to go over there and hope for the best and be done with it. The people at Ft. Sill said, "No, you're my body now. You're going to stay with us for eight weeks. I don't care what happens, blah, blah, blah." So I endured that and there's a whole lot of stories that I always think are funny that are involved in that, but I won't go into it. They then sent me to Ft. Huachuca after the eight weeks at Ft. Sill and I went to unattended ground sensor operator school.

Jim: Now you tell me what that does. (??)

Hess: Okay. I gotta tell you this, we got time?

Jim: Sure.

Hess: Let me tell you this story about Ft. Sill

Jim: No, I love it.

Hess: It's just one – it's an interesting story to me, ah, keep in mind, I'm an 11 Bravo, the worst thing you can be. The Army and everybody there at Ft. Sill knows that I don't want to be part of the OCS. I am just biding my time and all that, but I'm doing extremely well in the classes, and the athletic part of it and all that and all this PT stuff that you do is constant. And it's no problem, and you go through it and you do it. And I'm not bragging, but I was excelling at it. But they knew that I didn't want to be there. Well, if you really, really good on your PT, that's not good for my purposes. So, I go like the dickens on this dodge weaving jump thing. You had to get –

Jim: A little obstacle course?

Hess: Yeah, it's a little obstacle course, and in the middle of it there's an imaginary creek, a little [unintelligible] hole that is dug. And you have to jump across the creek and then dodge, weave, and run and back and forth, back and forth about five or six times. I'd go like crazy just setting the world on fire and the last time I purposely stepped in the middle of the creek. "Disqualified," and I don't know if he was a lieutenant or something came over to me, "Candidate Hess, what in the hell are you doing?" (Jim laughs) "Demonstrating a lack of commitment, Sir." Oh, --

Jim: He couldn't tolerate that.

Hess: 'Cause that was one of the things you could get out of OCS on if you were –

Jim: You were not committed.

Hess: Yeah, if you're not committed. They wouldn't listen to me. So, "What are you doing?" "Demonstrating." Wrong thing to do.

Jim: How did he retaliate?

Hess: Aw, he really didn't. He really didn't. He just went off in disgust, but – I'm sorry. So, there is the whole context. Eight weeks finally comes the old master sergeant, crusty old son-of-a-gun, comes over to me and he says, "Come down on to my office." And so I asked to report in as ordered to the master sergeant. "Well, you finally got your wish. You've been relieved from duty, but your MOS is still 13 Echo Charlie." "Yes, Sir." I am now a cannon cocker.

Jim: I was going to say, that was a new MOS.

Hess: Exactly, I'd never fired a cannon in my life.

Jim: MOS' are numbered?

Hess: Yeah, your military occupational – something or other. Status, I don't – whatever. I'd never fired a cannon in my life and now I'm a cannon cocker.

Jim: Where did they come up with those numbers?

Hess: Well, that's what people are when they come out of Ft. Sill because that's the artillery range. So they just said, "Ach, give him another 13 Echo."

Jim: So, now you're a what, a 13 Echo?

Hess: Yeah, so now I'm a cannon cocker. [laughs]. So – I – it was just kind of one of those things that –

Jim: In the artillery?

Hess: Yeah.

Jim: 105s?

Hess: Well, like I say, I'd never fired one. I still haven't fired one today. [laughs] I never did. But it was just kind of one of those things where he was so goll darn mad at me he thought he was pushing me and he was actually doing me a favor.

[Laughs]. So, anyway, I left St. Sill. Went to Ft. Huachuca and there I was a ground sensor – that was the ground sensor operator training school.

Jim: Ground sensor?

Hess: Yeah. They called it unattended ground sensor operator, UGSO. And was there for, boy, I honestly can't remember how long it was now. Doesn't seem like it was eight weeks, but maybe it was, and that's in Sierra Vista, Arizona, I think. It's just north of Nogales. That's all –

Jim: You have to tell me what those gentlemen (??) did.

Hess: Okay, ah, McNamara's Wall I guess was kind of the origin of it or the nexus for it. Ah, he envisioned that there should be some sort of electronic impenetrable barrier on the DMZ that you just, you couldn't walk through it. It was like a burglar alarm and it took off from there. Now, I'm just telling you things that I've been told. I don't have any authority to (unintelligible) this, but anyway what they were based on was seismic intrusions. They were miniature seismographs. Little boxes like about so was a typical one. It was called a Mini-SID and inside – and it was buried in the ground. You'd go out and you'd dig a hole in the ground, and you'd bury it in the ground, and inside that was a seismography. But the seismograph – I really shouldn't say seismograph because that prints things out –

Jim: (unintelligible) earthquake.

Hess: Yeah, the detector part of it was there, and it was sensitive enough that anybody walking within fifty feet of it would activate it. Well, if the mechanism inside got activated, that in turn activated a radio transmitter and it would start broadcasting a signal at a predetermined interval as long as it was activated, and the frequency that it was transmitted was very narrow, ah, ultra high frequency (unintelligible). Each individual transmitter had its own unique transmission code, so when it would come up on a read-out screen as 01 or 02 or whatever it happened to be, ah, and then those were the things that would put out there. They had magnetic intrusion detectors. Ah, maybe if I tell you how we used them it would make more sense in the context. What we would do is we'd go out with the infantry and we'd put these in on the ground along suspected or known routes of infiltration and anticipating that the bad guys would come walking down this trail and we would like to know when he is doing that. Ah, so we would put these things out. The problem was that you would also have potentially friendly people walking down the same trail. Well, how do you differentiate? So we would link it up with a magnetic detector, so that if there was both seismic intrusion and seismic activity, I should say, and there was a positive hit on the metal we could assume the bad guy is coming down there and he's carrying artillery rounds or a gun or ammunition, something like that. That was a fair target, and we would engage that with artillery. Down the trail maybe

a 100 yards you would have a kill zone set up [approx. 2 sec. gap in tape. Restarts with “bad guy” count 185] and soon as you got a viable target you’d call the artillery people and say “In ten seconds I want round to explode on that kill zone.” (makes “shoo” sound).

Jim: A “kill zone” is what? Twenty-five yards, is that it?

Hess: Well, it depends on what you were shooting – fifty or sixty yards with a 155 you could (??) do a lot of damage.

Jim: Drop it right in there?

Hess: Well, sometimes they did, and sometimes they wouldn’t (both laugh).

Jim: I see.

Hess: But that’s the system, that’s how it worked. We had other types of ones too. What I did was fly with the Air Force and ah, and the Army in the back seat of an OV-10 for most of, almost all of my time I was over there.

Jim: OV-10 was a –

Hess: It’s an Air Force dual engine turbo prop, twin seat with one in front of the other, forward air control.

Jim: Oh, I was gonna say that was just for observation?

Hess: Well, yeah, we had four cannons and on it and rocket pods. So we –

Jim: So it’s not a helicopter.

Hess: Oh no, no, no. It’s a – you want to pause that a minute? I’ll show ya.

Jim: Okay. Don’t get too far.

Hess: I’ll come back.

Jim: The world is waiting.

Hess: (laughs) I’m sure. (unintelligible) famous (unintelligible).

Jim: Oh, I see. You’ve got the rockets there (??). Yeah, it was a fully aerobatic aircraft. It was fun. It was neat. So what we would do –

Mrs. Hess (?): Got that back on?

Hess: Oh, yeah, we got that on.

Jim: How fast did this go?

Hess: Oh –

Jim: 150? Go far, go faster?

Hess: Gosh,

Jim: Well –

Hess: I can't remember. It would zip right along.

Jim: Yeah.

Hess: I can't honestly can't remember what the heck it was.

Jim: Okay.

Hess: Take off speed was around 100 knots but seems to me it was 140 knots, but anyway, so what I did was fly in the back seat of this OV-10. We would – I worked in what they called a “free fire zone.” We were up by Chu Lai which was in I Corps they called it, and the free fire zone, that means that there is not supposed to be anyone out there except the bad guys. All the friendlies –

Jim: So anybody you see there you would (??) shoot.

Hess: Yup, that was the target. If they were there they were in trouble or they were trouble. Ah, I would go out in the OV-10 and I flew with the Marines to put these sensors in. The sensors that I installed were actually like a torpedo or like a bomb. They had a fake tree on it. Rubber – looked like a rubber tree which was actually the antenna, and then there was a big disc, a round disc on the back where the fins would meet (??), the idea being that this thing – it was only about so big. It was pointed on the end. It would go in and it would bury itself in the ground.

Jim: Oh, you dropped it from the plane?

Hess: Yeah, and that big plate on the back would stop it from going too deep.

Jim: Right.

Hess: And the tree was there and the impact (makes a striking sound), would activate it and it would be active for about ninety days.

Jim: At what height?

Hess: From the airplanes? Oh, gosh – (??)

Jim: Tree level?

Hess: Oh, yeah, oh –

Jim: Or lower?

Hess: When we're deploying 'em and putting 'em in, you mean?

Jim: Yeah, when deploying 'em. Thirty feet –

Hess: Oh, no, not that.

Jim: Must be higher than that.

Hess: Yeah, maybe 500, close to 500 feet, couple hundred feet. You're low, and you're –

Jim: Right.

Hess: And anyway, so you put these things in and you activate and ideally you drop them so that they are a hundred yards apart. Now, sometimes (laughs) we weren't too precise at that. Sometimes – well, most of the time you didn't even know if you hit the trail.

Jim: Oh, boy.

Hess: I mean – and sometime you didn't know where the trail was. I just – you've got a navigation point and it's supposed to be right in there. You put it in there and see what happens.

Jim: So you just – it's close enough, right? (laughs)

Hess: Well yeah, I mean (laughs) I'm not going to go down there and jig 'em out. (laughs) I could not find it anyhow. So, there we are, we put these things in and I would fly two sorties everyday and we would go out in this free fires zone and we would read these things out. I was an add-on to the aircraft. The Air Force had their own missions and they were going to go on missions and those were basically bombing missions where they would – they would have what they called "URIs." And URI stands for "usually reliable information."

Jim: [Unintelligible]

Hess: Well, when you have those kinds of acronyms you always think that's because the guy wants to sound like he's dumb.

Jim: That's right.

Hess: But anyway, so what they are telling you is that you have some unusually reliable information that at such and such a coordinate there is probably some bad stuff going on out there, go drop some bombs in there. "Oh, okay." So we would do that. We'd go out and we'd reconnoiter it and see. In the meantime I am reading out these sensors and indentifying other targets that are active in the area and calling in an air strike --, it wasn't much (??) of an air strike.

Jim: What it really means, you guys (unintelligible) individually?

Hess: Yes.

Jim: I was going to say, you said each one had their own frequency.

Hess: Right.

Jim: Boy, that's a lot of work.

Hess: Well, it wasn't really that complicated once you, you know, you kind of got the hang of it. But the idea is that, let's just say that sensor #1 had the identity of #1 and ah, and you know because you put it in that was the southern most sensor. The next one is #2, that was the middle one, and # 3 was the northern one, and they're supposed to be 100 yards apart. Well, if #1 starts, is the first one activated and then the second one is #2 you know they are coming from the south to the north. You also know that because you keep track, you're actually filling out a little chart as you go, that it took 'em X number of seconds or minutes or whatever to transverse what we think is a hundred yards. And so that kind of gives you the rate of speed of the column of the bad guys who are going through there. And then you keep track of how long that first sensor is activated and knowing that it will stay active for as long as somebody is within fifty yards of it, it gives you an idea of the --

Jim: (unintelligible)

Hess: Well, the total length of the column.

Jim: (unintelligible)

Hess: Right, and then they just -- we used, gosh, I think it was something like the average troop will have four meters between them or something or four yards between them. So we just divided by four and you should come up with a number. So, you got twenty guys let's say, you think. And then you try to

confirm this as they go through this sensor field and in the meantime you have alerted artillery to get your gun aimed at such and such a spot, "I think I've got a target, blah, blah, blah." You confirm it and when you think they are in that kill zone you tell the artillery to fire.

Jim: Did you plan a course?

Hess: Yeah, we were up, we were up high. We're up maybe, oh [Approx. 9 sec. gap in tape] that's true, but anyway we would watch and we'd know where the artillery was supposed to go in and pretty soon you would see in the jungle, you know, some smoke coming up. Okay, we got the rounds in the right place. You never knew what happened. You never knew if you hit, good, bad or indifferent.

Jim: No [unintelligible].

Hess: We – a couple of times we would do it. We would try to fly down there, but you couldn't tell (??).

Jim: Now you said you did some of this with the Marines too.

Hess: We put them in with the Marines –

Jim: Oh.

Hess: And the only reason we did that was because they had the right apparatus on the bottom of their airplane to release sensors. But then I flew with the Air Force.

Jim: It's still attached to the Army.

Hess: You what?

Jim: You were still part of the Army?

Hess: Yeah, I was part of the Army. I was just a guy in Army clothes.

Jim: So they loaned you to the Air Force and to the Marines.

Hess: Yep, yep.

Jim: But, you became [Unintelligible] – special –

Hess: Well, I guess so.

Jim: Dropping these (unintelligible).

Hess: It was unique, yeah, different.

Jim: This was called – Bill Brewster this, “Operation Something.”
Hess: Target Mission Force, they called it.

Jim: Target Mission Force.

Hess: Yeah, that was the name of our our group. Now maybe he was talking about “Igloo White.” Op—

Jim: That’s it. What’s this “Igloo White?”

Hess: That was the overall code name for the whole program in Viet Nam.

Jim: What do you mean the whole program?

Hess: Well, they had these sensor teams throughout Viet Nam, all over the place.

Jim: Were they all involved with the sensors?

Hess: Yeah, right, right, and they called this project “Igloo White.” I have no idea why.

Jim: Well, igloos are white. That’s (unintelligible).

Hess: (laughs) Okay.

Jim: I mean, not many in Viet Nam. (laughs)

Hess: That’s true too. Boy, tell me about that.

Jim: Where was your base?

Hess: I was at Chu Lai most of the time and then –

Jim: Chu Lai is half way up?

Hess: It’s about three quarters. Just south of –

Jim: Yeah, it’s north of Da Nang, though.

Hess: Just south of Da Nang.

Jim: Just south.

Hess: Well,

Jim: I shouldn't say "just." I know Da Nang on the (unintelligible) so I know where that is.

Hess: Yeah. It's south of Da Nang, though.

Jim: It's about 200 miles north of Saigon?

Hess: Okay.

Jim: Right? Something like that.

Hess: I don't know. I've never been there.

Jim: No, I haven't either, but I look at the map.

Hess: I mean, I've never been to Saigon. I don't know.

Jim: Yeah.

Hess: It's got to more than a couple hundred miles I would think. Seems like it was a long ways. They called it the "Northern Highlands."

Jim: Anyway, that was your base.

Hess: Yeah. That's where I flew out of. In the last about three months I was the NCOIC of the sensor brigade for the 198th Infantry Brigade. I am not sure if it was brigade or battalion; brigade I guess it was. And so those last about ninety days I was on a place called "Hawk Hill," which was a firebase and that was right up there against the DMZ north of – oh, I shouldn't say DMZ –

Jim: How wide was the DMZ?

Hess: I misspoke. It was right up against the border between the Marines' operation area and the Army's. The DMZ was up a bunch north yet. I don't know how far.

Jim: How wide was that DMZ?

Hess: I have no idea.

Jim: Several miles?

Hess: Never got there.

Jim: How did you manage to stay out of it?

- Hess: I wasn't looking for trouble. That's not quite true, but – [laughs] – so anyway then at Hawk Hill, ah, like I say, I was the NCIOC, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the unit up there and so then we had firebases. Let me just say that again, we had teams on the firebases throughout that 198th Infantry Brigade.
- Jim: Now a team is that – in some way you are talking about a permanent group or they would be there temporarily?
- Hess: No, it was a permanent group. They were –
- Jim: That would be a platoon size or a company size?
- Hess: Ah it wasn't even a company size. It was five or six guys.
- Jim: *Alone on a hill?*
- Hess: Oh, no, no. We're just – we are arguing about semantics here.
- Jim: Okay.
- Hess: Ah, the sensor team was a group of five or six guys. Now we would assign a sensor team to a firebase. On that firebase, yeah, you would have a company size group there of infantry people operating out of there. Plus you probably have got a company size of artillery too. –
- Jim: Artilleries. [Unintelligible]
- Hess: But we were just supplemental. But, we would, again, go out with the infantry guys. They'd put out these sensors and they would try to acquire targets, and the other thing they did is they provided security for the firebase itself because we had the ability to know if the bad guy was coming. And, ah, well, so we had that value.
- Jim: Right. So the base [Unintelligible].
- Hess: Yeah, yeah. So that was kind of the overall operation and –
- Jim: How long were you there?
- Hess: Just a year and –
- Jim: Was the rotation back home automatic or?
- Hess: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: You knew then when you had put in your year in?

Hess: Yeah.

Jim: That was pretty much standard for all troops?

Hess: I, I'm not sure. At least for the Army it was. I don't know how the Air Force and the other guys operated. Army, yeah, it was a one year stint.

Jim: Otherwise did you stay healthy over there?

Hess: Yeah, you – get hurt –

Jim: Did you take malaria pills?

Hess: Malaria pills and stuff like – the teeth stuff – what did they call that? Fluoride capsules.

Jim: Yeah.

Hess: And all that stuff. Yeah, we only had a couple of terrifying moments. That wasn't too bad so –

Jim: What was that?

Hess: Well, you'd get rocket attacks and that type of stuff.

Jim: You mean the base that you're staying?

Hess: Yeah. So –

Jim: Were you in tents?

Hess: No, at Chu Lai that was a division headquarters so we had a physical structure there of plywood type shed.

Jim: Fox hole outside –

Hess: Yeah, bunker.

Jim: When the rockets came you had a place to die in.

Hess: You got it. Yeah, that's where you went out there and if there was incoming you would go in there and hope to hell one round did not get you all. That was the way that went. Now, at Hawk –

- Jim: Almost a cyclic (??) deal that they –
- Hess: No, no. At Chu Lai I can only remember three occasions where we had incoming. One of the times we were up in the airplane. When we came back the place was – not in real good shape [laughs].
- Jim: It was probably one of those places.
- Hess: Oh, yeah (laughs) we were worried because we didn't know if we could land. (laughs)
- Jim: Or if anybody was still around.
- Hess: Yeah, you know, and that's where they are always shooting for. They are trying to hit the airfield because they know the fuel is going to be nearby there and if they can knock out the aircraft that's better than people really. And if they can put holes in the runway that's even better so we were worried if we could get down, but, you know, we did. Bu the other two times we were on the ground –
- Jim: Didn't you attract rifle fire flying at low level?
- Hess: Yep, yeah, yeah.
- Jim: You did this in daytime?
- Hess: Oh yeah.
- Jim: I would imagine you would get a lot of rifle fire.
- Hess: We got, I only know –
- Jim: Within range.
- Hess: I only know of it twice. I actually confirmed it. The tracers were going right past the canopy. So I knew we were getting shot at. The other time, honest to God, I could hear it. And I wasn't in an OV-10 that day. I was with the Army. In a basically a Piper Cub.
- Jim: That's worse!
- Hess: Oh geez, I mean, they don't even give you a Sears catalog to sit on in that thing. (Jim laughs) There is no metal in them. They're fabric and ah, you are just, you are really out in the open. But, we went out, I honestly can't – well, yes I can too, I think it was LZ Mary Ann was the name of the place. I'm pretty confident of that. We were out near LZ Mary Ann and this was a place where I –

Jim: LZ? Landing zone?

Hess: Yeah, landing zone. Ah, this was an area where I had worked with the Air Force for four months, five months so I kind of knew the area from the air, and they decided, the Army was going to put in a fire zone out there or a fire base out there. And oh, great, well, this is interesting, ah, so we went out there to be supportive. One day they had some incoming rocket fire and etc. and we were in the area so, I betcha I know were those guys are because I worked in that area all the time. Ah, we went out there, and we were down really low. I mean really low, and I could actually hear the gunfire at us. [laughs]. Whoa!

Jim: You probably wouldn't see it. Anything that went past would go right through that fabric and out the other side without you knowing it.

Hess: Yeah, and it was small arms fire, so –

Jim: Yeah.

Hess: And a lot – you are not going to see tracers from most of the small arms fire. Machine guns you would, but AK-47s I don't think they worried about tracers too much. But, yeah, that was – that got my attention. The other thing I did was I flew in an aircraft that's called the "Beaver." It was a – oh, maybe a four place aircraft. We would go up in that from time to time when we could not hook on with the Air Force for some reason, and that was a slow moving thing. You would just go out there and putter around at 2,000 – 3,000 feet and ah –

Jim: That's not that Canadian Plane they flew – I flew in one (??) when I went fishing up north.

Hess: You would have flown on what's called the "Otter."

Jim: It's a high wing.

Hess: Yeah, that was called the "Otter."

Jim: Yeah, it's a high wing, four passenger, single engine.

Hess: Yup, with a big –

Jim: But it had pontoons as I remember.

Hess: Yup, and it's a little bit smaller version of it they call it the "Beaver."

Jim: Yeah.

Hess: Otter, the Beaver, whatever.

Jim: Boy, that's an old standard airplane.

Hess: Yup, and it's got that big Lycoming engine, radial engine on it, yeah. Well, if you ever get a chance to look at one you will notice on the front cowling there is a supercharger intake. It's a big air scoop, like this. Well, we're flying along and all of a sudden [sound of hands rapidly clapping] somebody is shooting at us you know. Baaqdang! You hear this, you know, gol, and the motor quits.

Jim: Wonderful.

Hess: Holy Jesus, you know you do the ten second dash into your parachute and all that and the pilot, he just freaked out and he is calling "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, Mayday," like that. I tapped him on the shoulder. I said, "Why you don't switch over to the radio instead of the intercom so somebody else can hear you?" (both laugh)

Jim: He had it on intercom?

Hess: Yeah.

Jim: So even if –

Hess: Yup, he was telling me we were in trouble. I knew that [laughs]. He didn't have to tell me.

Jim: Oh, that's funny.

Hess: And the motor is just bup-de-bup, bup-de-dup, bup-de-bup—

Jim: Gonna die, right?

Hess: Yeah, aw, geez, we're going down in that frickin' jungle and I thought, aw geez.

Jim: Get the helicopters.

Hess: And I've got this classified stuff and I'm thinking --.

Jim: Better get rid of.

Hess: Yeah what am I going to do with it, ai yi yi. All of the sudden, the machine gun fire stops and the motor vroom! Boom, we went right straight home.

Jim: Had four Jack Daniels, right?

Hess: Yup, cleaned our pants and all that stuff. And what had happened, nobody was shooting at us at all. A piece of the fuselage had broken free from the – there's a cowling over that engine, had come back and was [sound of hands rapidly clapping]

Jim: -- the propeller.

Hess: Over – no, it was flappin' over that supercharger intake. And so it sound like a machine gun fire and of course the motor was quitting because it couldn't breathe and then that thing broke off and the motor was fine. [laughs].

Jim: Boy!

Hess: But, that got our attention.

Jim: I'll bet (??). You thought this was it.

Hess: Oh, yeah!

Jim: I'm gonna be a jungle fighter.

Hess: Oh, man, yeah, and gee you think about prisoner of war and all. And the thing that was really ah, it makes me kind of emotional even just sittin' here talking about it today, when you are out there flying they've got all sorts of different radio bands out there and one of them is the universal distress one. And everybody hears that and time after time, you "Beeper, beeper, come up voice." That means a pilot's down.

Jim: Oh.

Hess: Because you've got your survival vest on and all that fits underneath your parachute apparatus and everything you are wired into or hooked into. And when you get on the ground you are supposed to activate your beeper and that is the homing device and so then you listen and when the good guys are coming to try and find you they want you to come up on voice. So they say, "Beeper, beeper, come up voice." Well, that means you are supposed to switch over now and talk to them. And so every time you heard that you know that somebody got shot down, and that was always sort of unsettling –

Jim: Sure.

Hess: That maybe I better (laughs) count my lucky stars or I might –

Jim: You had one of those too?

Hess: Oh, sure.

Jim: Yeah.

Hess: Yeah, everybody did. Everybody that flew and that it wasn't me that was sayin' – you know, setting off my beeper.

Jim: You happen to recall the range on that?

Hess: No, don't (??). The other thing what was crazy is that we almost killed ourselves one day. We were flying and they – well, all these radio broadcasts in your ears and you listen to them because they're important to you. But we were out in LZ; I can't remember the name of it anymore. I know where it was, but I just can't remember the name of it, and they were taking fire from a recoilless rifle. We called that a "reckless rifle". So, we were in that area and we felt we could be supportive, because we should be able to see the "reckless rifle" when it fires it fires, it makes one hulluva big puff of smoke and we should be able to see that thing, and sure enough, we could identify it. And so then we were directing their artillery fire onto that recoilless rifle to get that off of the – get the fire away from the LZ firebase. Ah, so we were busy and we were flying and all of the sudden, Jim, and Gail (??) countryside erupted. I mean erupted. You cannot conceive of what happened, but I can't describe it, but it was an Arc Light. And an Arc Light is a B-52 strike and it literally wiped out an entire valley and we weren't a quarter of a mile away from it. Damn near flew into it. Literally, right into it.

Jim: Even though those guys are up here?

Hess: We had been told, we had been told.

Jim: That there was going to be some day an air strike?

Hess: Yeah, they tried to disguise it. On the radio they say, "there will be a heavy artillery strike at 0800 hours at such and such a location." Well, heavy artillery, yeah, yeah right, yeah okay, that means there is a B-52 strike coming. But, we were busy with this other thing and it just didn't click with us that, my god that's where we are! (laughs) You know.

Jim: You were – [unintelligible].

Hess: Yeah.

Jim: If you'd been over though (??) that could have turned you over from that concussion or –

Hess: Well, either that or one of the bombs –

Jim: Would have taken you with

Hess: take the wing right off or something, you know.

Jim: Yeah!

Hess: But I've got pictures – you guys have got the pictures of that, and it is absolutely incredible the devastation of one those strikes. It just levels everything. It is the goldarndest thing you ever saw and this went on and it's like somebody with a – oh, I don't know what –

Jim: A scythe?

Hess: Yeah, but you gotta put the smoke and the concussion all that stuff in there and it just walks right up the valley. Just starts here and just goes (sound of whirring). Right up through there and it's gone. Ray Boland, you know, who runs everything down there at the Veterans down there. He's a – runs a – he's the super boss of everything.

Jim: Okay.

Hess: He was a helicopter pilot. He said one of the things he always had to look out for was getting' involved when the B-52 strikes -- Yeah.

Jim: He said because the concussion when they laid down these carpet bombs was so intense he said they could just blow us right out of the sky.

Hess: Oh, I don't doubt it did, yeah.

Jim: He said it'd just flip us right over if we were in the way.

Hess: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was unbelievable power. I will never forget that. And I know you got pictures of that stuff that I gave you. But, yeah, that was a harrowing experience (laughs) there. I mean, geez –

Jim: (laughs) And they were on our side, too.

Hess: Yeah, right. I'll never forget that. It was funny 'cause one of the guys that worked for me was a warden was a tail gunner on a B-52. And that is the only gun a B-52 had is in the tail. I don't know why they worry about the tail, but they do. So I was telling him this story and he was laughing. "Oh boy, you little boys. You fly those little planes" and that. But he would tell me that he would – he was in the back there in one of his missions. In fact his primary mission was to watch for rockets coming in, and he said he'd sit back there and he'd see the rocket coming up. He said you'd put a circle with a grease pencil on the plexiglass on your little bubble around that rocket. And then you'd look way for

a little while and you'd look back and the rocket was not in the same circle you were okay. If it was in the circle is was you that it was after 'cause it was still comin' at you. But, you know, so if you mark it here and it's gone up there now
 –

Jim: It's (unintelligible).

Hess: So then –

Jim: I'm sure they discuss that with the pilot by?? moving.

Hess: Oh sure, yeah, yeah. They took all sorts of evasive actions, and they put out this – they have this jamming stuff that they throw out the airplanes –

Jim: (unintelligible)

Hess: Foil, stuff like that.

Jim: Confuse the rocket –

Hess: Yeah, so that was a little different irony (??) that we were involved in that. But we'd do the same type of thing. We didn't have rockets to deal with, but we would write all sorts of information on the inside of the canopy with grease pencils and you'd come back – you'd have all these coordinates and this crap written on there –

Jim: This just to remind you when you got back home to put it down on paper?

Hess: Yeah, that plus the coordinates you were calling into the artillery fort he strikes. Because they'd be – they have everything marked off in grids over there and we'd have to look the maps that we had in the aircraft. You know, you just have a map the size of your lap and then you're gonna have to figure out exactly what the coordinates are. And so you are talking six, seven long digit numbers and try to get them in there – [unintelligible] - Got to see the South China Sea and a little island called “Kuwia (??) Island”, a little volcanic –

Jim: A little R & R?

Hess: No, that was just one day it was raining so bad that the pilot got lost.

Jim: Oh.

Hess: He wouldn't admit that, you know, today, but ah, that's in the film too that you guys got. We were out and the weather was marginal when we left and we thought, well, we will go out and see what we can do and do something, fine. If not, we'll come back. Well, it was crappy. We couldn't do anything. So we

came back and it was all cloud over and of course – we’re – that’s the Highlands over there so there’s mountains and all that and you don’t want to go down through the clouds ‘cause you run into the side of a mountain, you know, so you stay up above that and everything and the pilot radios – or intercoms back and says, “Well, we’re going to dive down through this stuff now.” He says, “We should be clear of the mountains by now.” And so he is going down through this -- you’ve got the film of it, through it so fast the plane is starting to shudder and everything we’re maxing out and all that. All of the sudden he comes out way the hell out over the South China Sea. And he say’s (Jim laughs) “Oh” and I knew he didn’t know where he was [laughs]. And he didn’t – he had no concept how far away from the mountains he was. He could have been the other way for all.

Jim: Right, in Cambodia.

Hess: Yeah, so we came out over the South China Sea and ended up out by the Kuria (??) Islands out there and it was just kind of a pretty scene. You’ve got the film of that, too. Viet Nam has got the most beautiful green. I don’t know. It’s an iridescent, real vibrant green to it for some reason or another that I’ve never seen any place else.

Jim: Almost like chartreuse? That sort of thing or?

Hess: Well, not really chartreuse. No, it just has no iridescence to it. It’s a sparkle. It’s almost like a sparkle from a moss, like a sphagnum moss. I don’t know if you ever looked at that real close. It sparkles. It was a vibrant type of green. And then that was that. (unintelligible).

Jim: Did you call home often?

Hess: Ah, no. We got – I know I called home once, at least once, [End of Tape 1, Side A, Ca. 45 min.] maybe twice. Once I can remember for sure. And, oh, I’m sure you are familiar with the system, the interviews you’ve done. They have these ham operators that relay the messages apparently along and they always the – whenever you were done with the phrase you were saying, you had to say “Over” there’s are fifteen guys who that go flip, flip, flip, flip, flip. [laughs]. I don’t know if that is true or not. [laughs] So, yeah, I called home one time. My mother was so excited she forget to say “Over” [laughs]. Well, we got to Cambodia once, or Laos, actually. I didn’t go to Cambodia. Went to Laos once. I’m not sure we were supposed to be there.

Jim: Sneak in? (??)

Hess: Yeah (unintelligible) There was some –

Jim: That’s no place to go down I understand.

Hess: No –

Jim: Some of the guys I've talked to say that crash landing in Laos – they said those farmers, why they're like to stick you with a pitchfork.

Hess: Oh, is that right.

Jim: Yeah, so, I don't know why, but –

Hess: Probably didn't like us.

Jim: Obviously – [unintelligible] – stateside.

Hess: No, I, I was out as soon as I came back.

Jim: Wouldn't (??) they encourage you to sign up for another tour?

Hess: You know I betcha they did, but I don't remember it if they did.

[End of Interview]