

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DAVE VAN DYKE
Forward Air Controller, Air Force, Vietnam War
2003

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Van Dyke, Dave (1945-). Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Van Dyke, a Coronado (California) native, discusses his U.S. Air Force service during the Vietnam War. Van Dyke discusses his basic training at Lackland Air Force Base (San Antonio, Texas), and officer training school in Valdosta (Georgia) before service in Vietnam in late 1969. Van Dyke mentions his survival skills training at various U.S. Air Force bases before his attachment to the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division (Laikay) at Ben Wa (Vietnam) in October 1969. He details various ordnance aspects of his daily flight missions as a FAC (Forward Air Controller) in OB-10 and T-37 aircraft as a lieutenant. Van Dyke talks about the ambiance of rustic living and being the “second guy” in combat in Cambodia, May 1970, while assigned to the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Tienyen, Vietnam). He elaborates on his combat impressions of “blowing up a lot of trees and monkeys” and having to fly after a long night of drinking at a USO show in Vietnam. He concludes with his impressions of distrusting the Vietnamese people and other fliers’ “unsafe acts” causing their deaths while on assignment.

Biographical Sketch

Van Dyke (1945-) served with the U.S. Air Force, attached to the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions, during the Vietnam War. He flew WC-135B’s as an air weather service pilot after leaving Vietnam in November 1970.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2003.

Transcribed by Michael Chusid, 2005.

Transcription edited by Daniel Birk & John McNally, 2007.

Jim: Today is July 18th, 2003. I am Jim Kurtz. I am the person who is conducting the interview. The interviewee's name is Dave Van Dyke. Dave, where were you born?

Van Dyke: Coronado, California.

Jim: What year?

Van Dyke: 1945.

Jim: 1945. And where did you go to school?

Van Dyke: I was an Air Force brat, and I ended up graduating from Madison East in 1963.

Jim: So was your father stationed at Truax Field when you ended up –

Van Dyke: That's right, yes.

Jim: What did you do after high school?

Van Dyke: University of Wisconsin.

Jim: Okay. And did you get a degree there?

Van Dyke: I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology, graduating in 1967.

Jim: 1967. Were you ROTC?

Van Dyke: No.

Jim: Was ROTC mandatory when you went?

Van Dyke: Yeah, it was mandatory your freshman year, like, everybody had to do it, as I recall.

Jim: Okay. So what did you do when you got out of college?

Van Dyke: Ten days from the day I graduated, I got my draft notice? And at that time I went to the Air Force and the marine recruiter. I took the test in both places for officer training school and for flight school and passed them both. The Air Force recruiter said, "Oh, you'll go down to San Antonio. You'll need to take your golf clubs. It's wonderful." The marine recruiter said, "We'll teach you how to stick a bayonet in the gut of them gooks," and so forth. And you're going to be run all over Parris Island [S.C.] or something. And I decided maybe Air Force was the way to go. I want to be a pilot, and that was the thing I chose.

Jim: Okay, so when did you enter active duty?

Van Dyke: Ah, it was October of 1967.

Jim: October '67. And where did you go for your first duty station?

Van Dyke: Lackland. The Air Force base in San Antonio, Texas, for officer training school.

Jim: So you didn't have anything like OCS, or was this like OCS?

Van Dyke: This is OCS for the Air Force.

Jim: Okay. And how long was that?

Van Dyke: Ninety days. I was a ninety-day wonder.

Jim: And what type of training did you receive at this training?

Van Dyke: Marching, marching. How to wear a uniform, how to stand in line. We had academic stuff, classroom courses in the UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice], Air Force regulations, you know, rank, uniforms, that sort of thing. All the things you needed to know to become a butter bar [a derogatory term for a second lieutenant].

Jim: After you finished OCS, did you make any friendships there that carried into your Air Force career?

Van Dyke: No. I've run into a couple of guys since graduating, but there were no real friendships.

Jim: Okay. What was your next duty assignment after OCS?

Van Dyke: I was undergraduate pilot training at Moody Air Force Base, Valdosta, Georgia.

Jim: And what did that consist of?

Van Dyke: That consisted of thirteen months of learning how to fly airplanes.

Jim: And what kind of planes did you fly?

Van Dyke: They flew the T-41, which was a two-seat military version of a Cessna-172.

Jim: Okay.

Van Dyke: And that was thirty hours or thirty-five hours of flying time. And from that we went to the T-37, which was a twin-engine jet trainer.

- Jim: Is that the same plane that they converted into a tactical fighter?
- Van Dyke: It's the same air frame. They put bigger engines in the fighter and a gun on it and bomb racks and wing tanks, but this didn't have any of that – it was just a slick wing and smaller engines, but it was a very maneuverable airplane to fly in. And then we went to the T-38, which is the supersonic trainer, and that was the final bit of training.
- Jim: And so you were trained to -- Was this for, actually then for single- or multi-engine jet aircraft this the training you received?
- Van Dyke: Right. We came out of pilot training with a commercial pilot's license, with a instrument certificate and a multi-engine center-line thrust rating.
- Jim: So that takes us roughly to early 1969.
- Van Dyke: March of '69.
- Jim: Okay. What happened then?
- Van Dyke: From there I went to Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington, for survival skills.
- Jim: Okay, and what did that consist of?
- Van Dyke: There was a couple of classroom sessions and then we went out on a what they called an escape-and-evasion course where we were captured and then put into prison camp for, I think it was four days as prisoners – two days in isolation, and two days in a group camp.
- Jim: Then did they let you go and try to escape?
- Van Dyke: No, then we went back, and they told us all the things we did wrong. And then they took us up into the mountains. At this time there was still snow in the mountains, and we spent one week learning how to eat rabbits and make shelters in the snow. And then they put us on another escape-and-evasion course, where we had to read a topographic map and follow a compass and be at certain places at the end of each day. And that's where we had camp. We lived off a pemmican bar of potato and onion and a couple of instant coffee packets for four days. On the fourth day, we ended up at a spot where the busses came and brought us back.
- Jim: In your pilot training did you have any experiences with topographical maps and stuff like that, or was this -- ?
- Van Dyke: Nah, we did have experience with sectional charts, which are a different scale than topos, but we had maps, you know.

- Jim: Okay, so was this your first experience then with topographical maps when -- ?
- Van Dyke: No. I had worked with them as an archeologist in college.
- Jim: Okay. When you completed your survival training, what was your next --
- Van Dyke: My next place was Homestead Air Force Base in -- down by Miami, Florida, and that was for sea survival. And there they toss out, get out of airplanes that go under water, and how to survive if we were to have an over-ocean bail-out or crash.
- Jim: Okay. And how long was that?
- Van Dyke: That was only a week.
- Jim: Okay. And how did you get in the water in those situations?
- Van Dyke: The Air Force owned a boat, believe it or not [laughs]. And they took us out in Biscayne Bay, and off the back of this, it was a fairly large boat, they had a motorboat come up and hooked to us and we para-sailed, and at a certain height they waved the flag at us, and we had to release the hook and then fall down into the ocean and inflate our rafts and then get in the raft and sit out there for several hours. And then a helicopter came, and you learned how to get out of the water with a helicopter.
- Jim: Okay. When you completed that training, what was your next --
- Van Dyke: Went to Clovis Air Force Base, or Cannon Air Force Base in Clovis, New Mexico, for fire tactics training. And there we learned how to shoot guns and drop bombs and shoot rockets off airplanes.
- Jim: What kind of planes did you --
- Van Dyke: Well, it started out with the F-86, and the New Jersey National Guard took their F-86's back, and we went and got in the -- they brought in the AT-33, which was kind of like the FA-8. [Laughs.] But with T-33 guns and bombs on it.
- Jim: And so what kind of targets did you shoot at?
- Van Dyke: Well, we -- for score we shot at big rags that were hung up between posts out on the range. And then they had some white piles of rocks. And they had scores on the range -- you dropped the bombs and shot the rockets at those, and they scored you by how close you got.
- Jim: Did you have any buildings or vehicles that you shot at?

- Van Dyke: Yes, we went down to Rio Doso – there's a range there that. The first range was attached – well, it was owned by Cannon. The next – Once we got where we qualified, we went down to Rio Doso, which was a hundred miles south of there. And they had tanks and trucks and bunkers and things like that that you went and bombed.
- Jim: Okay. How long was that training?
- Van Dyke: The training was actually forty hours of flying time, but it took around two months.
- Jim: Okay, and then what was your –
- Van Dyke: From there I went to Hurlburt Field in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. And that was OB-10 and FAC school.
- Jim: Okay, so then you knew you were going to be a FAC [Forward Air Controller, spotter]?
- Van Dyke: I knew I was going to be a FAC when I graduated from Moody, when I got the wings. Because one of the things about pilots is you get your choice of assignment upon graduation, based on your rank and class. Okay?
- Jim: So how was being a forward air controller regarded in the Air Force? Was it a good assignment or a bad assignment?
- Van Dyke: It was a good assignment.
- Jim: And why was that?
- Van Dyke: You flew by yourself. You had a pretty good airplane. And it was a job that – you know a lot of people couldn't handle it.
- Jim: Okay. Um, how long was that FAC training?
- Van Dyke: It ended up being about three months.
- Jim: Okay. And what did you do in this training?
- Van Dyke: Learned how to fly the OB-10, learned to talk on the radio and write on the windshield and fly the airplane and shoot rockets all at the same time. We got to listen to – We had to go up to Ranger school – the Army had a Ranger school somewhat north of there – and we had to go up there and let experienced Vietnam vets tell us about what they thought from the ground about working with FAC's and what they liked and didn't like about it, and so forth. And that was about it.

- Jim: Did you learn what to do when you were talking with somebody on the ground that didn't really know what they were doing, as far as calling air -- .
- Van Dyke: Ah, only – The main thing they got across to us there was not to get suckered into something that you just couldn't do. That sometimes you just got to say, "No." And don't be afraid to say it.
- Jim: Is that because of ground fire or topography?
- Van Dyke: No, no. It was more along the lines of killing your own people that the guy wanted you to bomb right in front of him. You didn't do it, 'cause you'd kill him too, so sometimes you had to back it off a ways.
- Jim: So basically it was communicating to find out that nowhere people were on land, and then make a judgement whether or not you could deliver the ordnance?
- Van Dyke: No matter what kind of ordnance to deliver. So this was really getting you oriented to that, so that you understood what you were capable of or you were valuable – the basics of how to get the job done. And why the job was that way. You know, we were told and we understood that the reason we were there was the Air Force needed somebody, living with the Army, that could talk to Air Force pilots and talk to Army grunts and – 'cause the two don't generally communicate very well – and yet be that person who could do it. The skill involved was getting where you could shoot a rocket and hit what you were aiming at. Want to know where to drop the bomb. Then you could control the situation.
- Jim: Did you have much discretion as to what kind of ordnance you could bring in?
- Van Dyke: Ah, no. You could ask for it, but you got what you got. The standard load of the fighters over in Vietnam was five-hundred pound high drag bombs and five-hundred pound napalm cans, and whatever kind of gun we carried.
- Jim: Okay. When you completed FAC school, what happened next?
- Van Dyke: I went to Vietnam.
- Jim: Okay. And did you –
- Van Dyke: Oh, no. I went to the Philippines. [Laughs.]
- Jim: And did you have thirty days leave before you went to Vietnam?
- Van Dyke: It ended up being about twenty-three. You got your papers, you had to be at Travis Air Force Base on such-and-such a day at such-and-such a time to get on the airplane.

- Jim: Okay. So you flew from Travis to the Philippines.
- Van Dyke: To Clark. Clark Air Base in the Philippines.
- Jim: Okay. You got off the plane there, and was that where your unit was?
- Van Dyke: No, we was still – It was just a bunch of pilots showing up, and we had to go to jungle survival school at Clark. And this was a week of people telling you about the good and bad things about a jungle. And then – actually it was about three days of that – and then two days of going out and, they had had the Negrito natives there that lived in the jungles. And they went out with you and taught you how to catch a lizard and a snake and they'd cook some snakes and lizards and showed us rice and how to make implements out of bamboo. You know, simple things, but stuff that they did: you know, it took them about ten seconds, and they had a bowl and a cup and a this and a that. Showing you that, yeah, you can eat out there, and make sure you cook the bananas before you eat them, and, you know, tricks of the trade. This is the food that's out here, here's what you do with it.
- Jim: In all this various training that you had, did you go with the same group of guys, or was it always different people that you --
- Van Dyke: It was always different people. There was no group thing involved as far as the Air Force – well, as far as forward air control was concerned. Now, fighter units went as groups, 'cause they rotated as a squadron, but FAC's went over as individuals.
- Jim: So it was very similar then to the Army as far as, you know, going and coming by yourself.
- Van Dyke: Right, yeah.
- Jim: What feelings did you have when you were at Clark Field, knowing that soon you were going a little farther west?
- Van Dyke: Ah, there was a little apprehension. You got to remember that I had just – maybe – turned twenty-four. I figured I could kick some ass and take some pains. You know, I was fairly self-confident in my flying skills and stupid stuff like that [laughs].
- Jim: So you completed your jungle training – then did you proceed to Vietnam?
- Van Dyke: Yes.
- Jim: And how did you get to Vietnam – C-130?

- Van Dyke: No, um, I think it was a DC-8. We landed at Tonson.
- Jim: Landed at Tonson.
- Van Dyke: Yeah, the thing about that – and I was thinking about this the other day -- got off the plane. And you know how your olfactory memory kicks in pretty strong on things? And getting off the plane there in Saigon, it smelled just like Los Angeles. It was smog. And it was the same smog smell. And it was, like, ugh! Well, this is weird. At any rate – there you go: there's an anecdote. [Laugh.]
- Jim: Well, I bet that was the same impression I had. It really smelled. I got there in the middle of the night, you know. What was your impression of the temperature?
- Van Dyke: It was the same as the Philippines.
- Jim: So you had been accustomed to it?
- Van Dyke: It had been hot for a week and it was still hot. I got there at about five in the afternoon.
- Jim: So then did you get picked up by the Air Force and taken where to next?
- Van Dyke: Yeah, there was a bus there waiting for whoever was going to Ben Wa, whoever was supposed to report to Ben Wa, which is just a little air base a little north of Saigon. And, of course, the interesting thing about that – I get on the bus, and it's got heavy-duty wire mesh over the windows, and we going: what the hell is that all about? You know, we're not prisoners. No, that's to keep the bad guys from throwing grenades in the bus as we drive by. We go, oh, jeez! That was the first indication that maybe something real was going on in here.
- Jim: When you got to Ben Wa, what happened then? Were you assigned to a unit?
- Van Dyke: Well, by the time we got there, everything was closed, so there was a duty-officer guy, somebody, who said, "Now, you guys, we're going to put you up over here in the brand new B. O. Q., which was a building out in the middle of nothing with a nice concrete wall around it. And he told us, "If you hear the siren go off, get into your bed." And it went off, and we had a rocket --
- Jim: -- attack? The first night?
- Van Dyke: Got attacked the first night we were there.
- Jim: How many rockets?

Van Dyke: I don't know. Three or four, maybe. But one of them landed, oh, about fifty yards away, and we were crawling under the bed. There were three of us that were there, that had come over on the plane together. And we had all been in the FAC school together, so we knew each other. We were the only three guys in the building, and we went over, you know, what the hell is going on? But at least we knew when the siren went off, it woke us up, and about five seconds later the rockets hit. And it really – One of them hit down the flight line, and it did set off an F-100 that started burning, and, you know, we were about a mile from there, and we could see it. And it was cooking off some rounds and things. And then the three others – The last one was the one that hit up by us. It was only about fifty yards away, but it put a nice big hole, that you could fit your hand through, on an engineering stake that held up a stop sign right there. You know, a piece of shrapnel went right through – holy moses!

Jim: For the first night, that was a good introduction. What then happened the next day?

Van Dyke: We got processed in. You know, we got three flight suits, two sets of boots, a helmet, a flak jacket, a rifle –

Jim: M-16?

Van Dyke: Yeah, M-16. A .38, web belt – the whole nine yards of it. We had to turn our pay tube, 'cause we carried a pay tube.

Jim: Say what a pay tube is for the record?

Van Dyke: You carried your payroll records with you, and it was in a cardboard tube with metal screw cap. It stayed nice and clean, and that was your proof of getting paid or not. And so you had to turn it in to the – as part of the signing in process, you'd turn it in. Then, they told us that we'd have to go to – I remember we had to get our international driver's license. That's one of the first things they made us do. So I had to go to driving school class – it was like an hour or something, but, you know, international driving signs, and they gave us a little certificate or license for your wallet, in case some Vietnamese cop stops you, I guess. I don't know.

Jim: What month are we taking about?

Van Dyke: We're talking about the end of October 1967.

Jim: '69, right?

Van Dyke: Excuse me. You're right: '69. The end of October 1969.

- Jim: So then, when we get done with driving school, were you assigned an airplane or a unit?
- Van Dyke: No, then we had to go to orientation class. And this was another couple hours or something. Some guy talked to us about flying in Vietnam. So there was a real – FACs fly at 1500 feet. He says, “Do it.” Alright. They didn’t bother telling you why. They didn’t tell you that helicopters, you know, flew at between 1000 and 1200 feet, and C-130’s flew at 2000, you know. And if you got anywhere else, you were going to be flying into somebody else. But there was a good reason for it. And it was the good things: don’t go below – they said 1000 feet. And the reason was the small arms fire, the bullet, isn’t arcing yet, so you’re still getting, you know, the straight shot. And some guy – If you took it to heart, it made sense. But it was kind of like, you know, the rules that are written and unwritten. And then of course we had the official rules of engagement. And that before you can put in an air strike, you have to get clearance, and you can either do it through the artillery or through the TOC, and the TOC will talk to the –
- Jim: Tactical Operations Center.
- Van Dyke: -- the Tactical Operations Center will talk to the village chief, or whatever, that’s in the area, whoever has the political authority to release the strike. Unless there’s troops in contact.
- Jim: In other words, you couldn’t have an air strike without Vietnamese approval, unless troops were in contact? Was that the rule?
- Van Dyke: Yeah, yeah. Unless it was a pre-planned strike, and those came rarely, but they came, and you would have a certain set of coordinates, and the FRAG would come down and say, we’re going to get hit today and we’re assigning this many fighters or something to it.
- Jim: What happened next?
- Van Dyke: Then, I got checked out – I got my in-country check-out in the OB-10, which means that -- The most amazing thing about that is: never in the time you go up there, have you ever had anybody say, well, get Arty clearance. You want to go from here to here. Let’s say, Arkick. In that case, I was going to go practice. Now, over by Long Phu, I was taking off, so, you know, there’s fifty miles or something like that. And they said, well, don’t you know Army artillery’s shooting guns all over the place? You don’t want to fly through an artillery strike. You’ll get killed! Well, what do you do? Well you call RE and tell them where you’re going and ask for clearance. So I called the RE frequency and talked to the guy, and he says – no, I says, “Do you got anything going today?” And the guy had a list of about four hundred things, and I didn’t know enough about how to ask the question yet, and so he’s saying, “From here to here, and heading da-da-da.” You know, from 10,000 to 13,000 feet there’ll be eight-inch mortar

rounds, or eight-inch howitzer rounds, going this way, that way. You know, I started turning to write it down, finally went, “F-f-f-f!” And the guy in back, the instructor, he was just laughing his ass off. He thought that was funny, because I didn’t know anything. And so, I learned how to ask the question after that. [Laughs.] And get an answer that made sense. Yeah, but if you were going somewhere – especially if you didn’t know where you were – when I had an area of operations as a operational FAC, I knew what was going on before I left. And it was a lot different than being a new guy, going around in somebody else’s area.

Jim: Okay, I’m gonna turn the tape over.

[End of Side A, Tape 1]

Jim: You had your practice run, and then what happened to you?

Van Dyke: Then you get assigned.

Jim: And what’d you get assigned to?

Van Dyke: I got assigned to the Second Brigade First Infantry Division. Laikay.

Jim: Okay, Laikay, which is a rubber plantation, correct?

Van Dyke: Yeah, yeah.

Jim: So how did you get to Laikay?

Van Dyke: One of the FAC’s at Laikay came down and picked me up. They said, be here at this time. And so the guy landed and walked over, and he said, “You’re the new guy?” “Yup.” And they asked if I had a fan. And I said no. And he said, “Well, let’s go to the attic.” So we went and borrowed somebody’s jeep and went over to the PX and got myself a big box fan, because, he says, if you don’t have this, you’re going to die. So we throw all of my stuff in the back of the OB-10. I climbed in back, and we flew up to Laikay.

Jim: Okay. Who did you report to Laikay.

Van Dyke: I reported to the air liaison officer, known as the ALO. That was an Air Force major. You could tell the FAC units were set up – they were assigned to infantry brigades, and ALO was in charge of the group. I was the seventh member of that group.

Jim: So there were how many – all pilots?

Van Dyke: Seven pilots.

- Jim: And did you receive an orientation there too?
- Van Dyke: Yeah, I had to – first of all, I went up in the back seat with other FAC's for about three rides, just until I could figure out where I was supposed to go and where I wasn't supposed to go. And then I did some front seat driving with the boss in the back until he figured I was not going to kill myself or break his airplane. Then I could go up by myself.
- Jim: How many planes did you have for the seven pilots?
- Van Dyke: I think there were four.
- Jim: And what kind of living conditions did you have? Where did you live proximate to the airfield?
- Van Dyke: We lived, oh, about twenty yards from the runway, right off the runway in a hooch, which – this one was built by the Army – it was a slab floor and had slat-sided walls and a tin roof.
- Jim: Did you have rocket bunkers or anything –
- Van Dyke: No. We didn't have anything at Laikay.
- Jim: Okay, did you -- Was there a perimeter outside the base?
- Van Dyke: Yeah, we were inside the base, and that was the headquarters of the First Infantry Division – there were a ton of Army troops there. And yes, there was a perimeter, lots of guns and things. [Laughs.]
- Jim: What other aircraft used that airfield?
- Van Dyke: Mostly it was helicopters, and the Army had the Caribou doing their freight hauling, and some [B&F] flying in and out, but primarily helicopters, and there was the First Division, or First Brigade of the First Infantry Division was also at Laikay. And those FAC's were up in a separate area up on the north end. We really didn't have any contact.
- Jim: So you were down by the village then, which is towards the south end of the base. What was a typical day like when you were –
- Van Dyke: It was getting up – got cleaned up a little. Wandered over to the mess hall and grabbed some food, and then you just checked when your flight was –
- Jim: So you had it preplanned, when you were going to be in the air?

- Van Dyke: Yeah, we had a flying schedule, and it changed from day to day, depending on who was there, what planes weren't broke and things like that. You know, we typically flew three-and-a-half hour missions with a slick OB-10, so it was –
- Jim: And would you fly with units on the ground?
- Van Dyke: Yeah. Before you took off, you went over to the Tactical Operations Center and you talked with the Army duty officer, and we had the big map on the wall and you knew where each of the units was out in the woods, and you either marked it on your map – most of the time you just made a note – and who they were, and you made a point of, when you took off, you went out and talked to them, let them know you were out. One of the things we did when I was there is we made some calling cards that said – our call sign was “Slugger” at the time. So I was Slugger 27. And we gave them to the field grunts, and they had them out there, and, you know, whatever you want us to do, just give us a call. We can do this, we can do that. We even got guns. [Laughs.] We'll shoot our guns for you, if you want.
- Jim: So you say the OE-10 had weapons?
- Van Dyke: Yeah, we had four M- 60s, so we were the “armed” FACs of Vietnam, that holds the rockets, so we carried four rocket pods – there were seven rockets in each pod, the 2.75 folding-fin aerial rocket. Fine weapon. So we had fourteen high explosives and fourteen Willie Petes.
- Jim: They used the Willie Petes to mark targets, right? That's white phosphorus.
- Van Dyke: That's right. White phosphorus. It was also a very effective offensive weapon, if you wanted to use it that way.
- Jim: Yeah, I've seen it up close. Um, so you'd fly three-and-a-half hours – would you fly seven days a week?
- Van Dyke: Yeah. I think – Well, I ended up getting thirteen air medals out of Vietnam, and an air medal was – what was it? – twenty mission days of flying. And so that was, you know – Plus I had half-way into my fourteenth air medal. So somewhere around 250 days I flew out of 365, plus I had two R & Rs and a couple of DNIFs –
- Jim: What's a DNIF?
- Van dyke: Duty Not to Include Flying.
- Jim: Okay.
- Van Dyke: -- that came about for various reasons. [Laughs.]

Jim: Would you like to discuss these various reasons?

Van Dyke: Well, one time we were drinking. 'Cause we didn't drink in Vietnam, but we did a lot. And one of my buddies knocked me off the bar stool. He took a cushion off the couch and smacked me, knocked me off the bar stool. I landed on my elbow and split it wide open. And so we walked on down to the medical tent, and the corpsman on duty looked at it and said, "Ugh, I've got to stitch it." And he thought we were pretty funny 'cause we were drunk. And we were officers, and officers can get into ugly things like that. And he says, "I can give you a shot." And I said, "Naw." And I pulled a bullet out of my .38 and I bit on the bullet and he stitched me up. So that's my "I-bit-the-bullet" story.

Jim: Were you at an Air Force or Army officers club when this happened?

Van Dyke: I was in the hooch.

Jim: In the hooch?

Van Dyke: Yeah.

Jim: So did you have an Air Force officers club or did you use the First Division?

Van Dyke: At Laikay they have the First Division officers club. And I was watching "2001 Space Odyssey" there – we got the movie and they were showing it out back – you know, and they have the screen set up. And I was watching that. And we got rocketed. Right in the middle of the freaking movie. And they had some nice slit trenches right around the officer's club that you could jump into when that happened, so we all did that. That was the end of the movie. So I didn't get to see the end for about twenty years.

Jim: How long were you at Laikay?

Van Dyke: We were at Laikay until sometime mid-January of '70, and then Second Brigade moved to Long Phu.

Jim: Are there any experiences when you were up in the air that you would like to share with us?

Van Dyke: The very first operational flight from Laikay I was in the back seat and simply had a set of A-37s that showed up and we were going to put in. And the lead aircraft rolled in on the target – we put a smoke on the target – and I was just a passenger here, I was watching. And so the guy who was up front shot the rocket, pulled off, cleared the big fighter in, and I heard him say, "Oh, shit, I dropped." And I looked back and I could see him, and then we pulled around, and what had happened is the napalm cans had fallen off as he rolled in. And what the pilot of the fighter did is he somehow figured it was important for him to watch those or

something, and he jerked the plane right around and he went into an accelerated stall, which put him in a spin and he went straight into the ground, and it was one of the things at flight school that they showed us was – they had movies of – ‘cause we used to spin the T-37s, and it was a good airplane to spin, ‘cause it not only went in well: it came out pretty good too. But it didn’t come out of a spin at 1000 feet, you know, above the ground. And so the very first flight I saw a guy fly into the ground.

Jim: That was American Air Force, not Vietnamese?

Van Dyke: That was American Air Force – it was a lieutenant colonel. Experienced guy. But he did it, and that was a real inexperienced thing to do. And of course the nape cans hit the ground – they were going to hit the ground no matter what he did. So, why did he do it, who knows?

Jim: Was your plane ever hit by ground fire?

Van Dyke: No, it was never hit. I was shot at many times – I’ve even seen the bullets go by, the tracers go by, but nobody ever hit me.

Jim: Okay. And what color were the tracers, remember?

Van Dyke: Green. You know, one night – it was north of Tainyen down the road a bit. And I got to be pretty good at night, ‘cause I had the starlight scope in the cockpit with me, and I’d catch guys doing shit and I’d – At any rate, I was out wandering around. And there was nothing that gave me a clue that there was anything going on, and it was a hunch. And I says, “Ah, I betcha there’s somebody down there.” And I just rolled in – I didn’t even have any of the switches on to shoot anything or anything like that. I was just goofing. I rolled in and all of a sudden: “Fffffff!” About five tracers. So that means about twenty rounds or so came my way, and they went right over the top of my airplane. And I said, “Shit!” So I went away, calculated and got them later. [Laughs.] I came back with overwhelming force – I avenged that insult.

Jim: With your own plane or did you have some other -- ?

Van Dyke: NO! I got the real thing!

Jim: Real fighters. Did you ever have an occasion to use artillery?

Van Dyke: All the time, I loved red-leggers. I – Another time at night, I was out wandering around over the Cambodian border – this is before we went into Cambodia. And this was also out of Tainyen. And looking through the starlight scope, caught a bunch of guys camping out. And they had a campfire, and that’s what picked it up. You’re just driving along in the middle of the night with your lights out, and there’s no light or anything – just looking – then all of a sudden, boom! I’m at

about 2000 feet – they can probably hear me, but they have no idea where I’m at. And watched, and you could see them moving, and they’ve got the fire going, so I called the red-leggers and had them put a Willy Pete. I figured out on the map where I thought I was, so I put one up over here over a bend in the river. But you could see the moon. And it went off, and I knew where I was at. So I gave them the coordinates, I told them: “Give me a fire mission.” I said, “Give me at least three tubes of Fire Perfect.” He says, “You want five?” I said, “Yeah, give me five.” So each one, I think, put in three rounds. So he had fifteen 105 millimeter howitzer round. And that place – and he goes, “Shots away!” And so I was down south and I was looking, just watching the fire, and the whole world just blew up – it was like, “Ha, ha, ha, you guys!” No, they had caused problems though.

Jim: So when you flew these three-and-a-half hour missions, would you fly more than one in a day?

Van Dyke: Sometimes.

Jim: And you were always pretty much alone in the plane. I mean, it could only really carry one person.

Van Dyke: It could carry two. There were two seats. But generally it was just you.

Jim: Did you develop any close relationships with any of the First Infantry Division people?

Van Dyke: Army guys?

Jim: Yeah.

Van Dyke: Naw, not really. You know, there were a couple that would come by the hooch and – Well, I take that back. Because we used to work with the helicopters quite a bit. And, as a matter of fact, as it developed there were the ghost riders, who were the loach pilots. And then there were the Rebels who were the Cobra pilots. And –

Jim: Loach is Low Observation Helicopter?

Van Dyke: Right. And they flew alone and they pretty much hung out at our place – they drank our booze. And so what we’d do is we’d get up there – we’d be droning around, ‘cause half the time you’re doing what is called a visual reconnaissance, or VR, or being bored shitless. So those guys would come up and say, “Let’s go do something.” Alright. And they’d get a hold of a Cobra, and we’d be standing by, ready to call up any air – anybody up who was in a fighter that was droning around – and the loaches would get into fights: they’d pick fights with guys out in the woods. They’d run across them and throw a grenade out the window, and they’d get all shot at, and the Cobra would come in and shoot them. And what we

found out – And we could watch this, and we were going, hey, wait a minute, guys – Well, the loach would throw out the grenade, the Cobra would roll in, and then when the Cobra'd roll off, everybody would come out from behind the trees and start starting shooting at him. I said, we have a great opportunity here. I said, as soon as you pull off, you pull off to the left. I'll roll in behind them. So we had three tiers of aircraft: one right at the treetops, the Cobra coming in, and as soon as he pulled off, the bad guys jump out and shoot. And then all of a sudden I'd be coming up behind them with fourteen high-explosive rockets. Blam! And it was like – ugh! Everybody got excited. We had fun. And the Army guys awarded me an honorary Wokity-1 badge.

Jim: What is that?

Van Dyke: Warrant officer, first class.

Jim: Okay.

Van Dyke: And I was one of the only RLOs in the country during that actual –

Jim: That's something that's interesting.

Van Dyke: As a matter of fact, I still got a scar here that went to – I forget. There's a helicopter base that those guys hung out at, and I forget where it was, but they came and picked me up one day and flew over there, and the boss says, okay, you're going to get drunk. And I said, no, I'm not. [Laughs.] They got me drunk in their club. They said, alright, if you're going to get this, we're going to accept you as one of our own, you got to stand on the table and say, "I'd rather have a sister that was a whore than a brother who flew a slick."

Jim: [Laughs.]

Van Dyke: And, you know, most of the helicopter pilots there flew unarmed helicopters, which were called slicks. And so there was a big rivalry between the armed helicopters and the unarmed guys. So the next thing I know I'm about this far from getting beat up by about two-hundred slick pilots. And one of them goes, you Air Force puke, blah, blah, blah, how tough are you? So he put his forearm up against mine, and we dropped a lit cigarette in between. And we sat there staring at each other to see who was tougher. And finally the thing just went out. You know, we both just had big huge burn holes on our arms, like my boss got mad at me. "You idiot." And, ah, "you're going to get infected." [Derisively.] But I got my Wokity-1 badge. [Laughs.]

Jim: So what did you do at Longthon? More of the same?

Van Dyke: More of the same. They changed the AO. We were between Longthon, which was due east of Saigon, well, thirty miles east of Saigon somewhere. From

Longthong to the coast south at Vung Tau was an area that the Thai Army had had, and they had retreated from, and so the First Infantry Division sent the Second Brigade down there, and said: clean it up. And it was kind of fun, 'cause there wasn't much going on down there. There was a fight every now and then, but it wasn't big unit operations or anything. They might run into five guys or something. Mostly it was Viet Cong going down to Vung Tau for R & R, and that's who you were running into. Guys either going or coming back from –

Jim: How long were you at Longthong?

Van Dyke: Til the big Red-1 went home?

Jim: And when was that?

Van Dyke: Ah, I forget. It was like March – February, March –

Jim: March '70. So after they went home, what was your next assignment?

Van Dyke: Ah, oh, man. When I was down there, one of the neatest things I did was I got to shoot the New Jersey that came over.

Jim: The battleship, you talking about?

Van Dyke: And so I got the duty, and the guy ahead of me – What we had was they were going to prove how big, heavy fire-power could do the job. So what happened was there was an area, they thought there was a large concentration of bad guys. So the first thing they did was they had an arc light on, which is a B-52 strike. And that was FACed by one of the other guys, who put on the arc light, and then he took off, because he had to go to Saigon and tell them what he saw. And then I was up there, and the New Jersey was sitting off the coast out of sight – you couldn't see it. So I put in the New Jersey – I directed the guns of the New Jersey, which was impressive.

Jim: How did it compare with the B-52 strike?

Van Dyke: Well, a B-52 strike is pretty much instant. It takes about one second for – what is it? -- about three-hundred bombs to hit the ground. And that's a big shock wave, and a lot of shit's going on, but it happens right then and there. And all you got is a big cloud of dust. And you know when you see the craters and the blown up trees and things. Well, the New Jersey was shooting those 18" rounds from off about ten miles, twenty miles away – whatever they do. And when they hit, they're fun to watch – they go off really nice. And they make a big hole.
[Laughs.]

Jim: That they do. Okay, now the First Division's going. What was your –

Van Dyke: Next assignment was the 25th Infantry Division at Tienyen.

Jim: Okay, what happened there?

Van Dyke: Well, I was with the First Brigade. That was because at that time I was an official FAC – all I need was just to get checked out in the AL, so I knew where the borders were and knew what the landmarks were. Knew where the different birdy camps were. You know, where guns are shooting from, you know, and so forth. And RAO was from Tienyen, west of the Cambodian border pretty much, right around the parrot's beak, around the elephant's ear. And we bordered with the First Air Cav, and they had the area to the east of us, north and east of us.

Jim: Anything different happen there from your First Division experiences?

Van Dyke: Ah, well at first, no, except that Tienyen was a lot more remote. The hooch wasn't bad, though, because it had been built by the Philippine civil engineering thing that was there, 'cause the Filipinos, they sent their Army guys and they built the hooch. We had plumbing and hot water, and we had a generator for electricity, so, you know, in that case it was luxury. The food sucked, very bad. It came in, it was no good. One night they did attack while I was there, and one of the guys – we set one guy up, and he was putting in spook on the wire. And then the MPs came back, 'cause we were back in our hooch. We were about 200 yards from the perimeter. So nothing was going on right in front of us. They said, you guys stay right where you're at. You got no business up there. And the MPs came by and said three guys got over the wire. We turned the dogs loose. And I didn't know about the dogs. And about an hour later they said we got them. But what they had was they had Great Danes that were trained to eat them. And they chased them down and ate them. It was, like, Holy Shit! You did not know this was going on. I saw them one day, they came by, and these dogs were like horses. I mean, they were huge. They had those big calluses on their elbows, like a horse gets. And it was a damn dog that they turned on them. And when the bad guys got in, everything smelled like the rice they were eating. [Laughs.] You know, we had a little Vietnamese guy who ran our generator. He had an ARVN that was wounded. And we had him down in our bunker. You know, kept him out of the way. But that was something. Haven't seen that happen.

Jim: Well, then you had the Cambodian incursion? What were your experiences there?

Van Dyke: I was the second guy across the border that day, when Nixon said we could go to Cambodia. My boss – I was fine – My boss said, wait. And we led the way, and the 25th Infantry Division followed us. And I took the south half and he took the north half of where they planned their attack and so forth. We actually had some really big unit fighting then. I mean, there was a lot of shooting going on and stuff. So for about a month, that was a real war that was going on, with real battles and real –

Jim: Were you getting more ground fire there?

Van Dyke: Oh, yeah. And concentrations of it and stuff. And there were – You know, guys were getting ambushed, and we were chasing the bad guys off. You know, there was actual troop movement and things, you know, where you could actually see crowds of them going here and there.

Jim: We're going to change –

[End of Side B, Tape 1]

Jim: In what months was that?

Van Dyke: When was that? Was that April of '70 when that happens?

Jim: I think so.

Van Dyke: You know, the funny thing was, that in the whole Vietnam thing was fucked up, was about two weeks before we invaded Cambodia, one of the guys at Tienyen had caught two bad guys out in the open over at the Cambodian border. And they took off running towards Cambodia, and he shot at them with a rocket, you know, 'cause anybody out there doesn't belong there anyway and was there for mischief. And, you know, he tells us about it, how he chased the guys back into Cambodia, and we all drank about it and thought it was funny. Well, at four in the morning the next morning, a helicopter landed right outside our hooch, and it was the guys who have no rank coming, and they grabbed the ALO, the major and Mack and made them get on the helicopter and go out and show them where that rocket impacted, 'cause these guys had gotten back to somebody in Cambodia and said that they were on Cambodian soil and attacked by American aircraft. And so Cambodia protested to the United States who wanted to hang the damn pilot that was flying in Cambodia, trying to shoot Cambodian citizens. And so they brought them there, and they had to find out where the rocket impacted, and they did not find it. But that's kind of a hard thing to find out in the middle of the woods.

Jim: Yes, it is.

Van Dyke: And fortunately it was – He had shot a Willy Pete at them, and there had been a little fire. So they, you know, found the fire. It was in Vietnam. We knew where the border was, I mean, it wasn't that indistinguishable. You know, there were parts where you could be off a little bit here and there, but generally there's a reason they do the border there, and that's 'cause there's a creek or a treeline or a sandbar or something: physical geography that occurs.

Jim: Do you have any specific events that occurred in Cambodia you'd like to relate?

Van Dyke: Ah, one day – this was up by Mimo – a unit was going from a forest in that area, and you got a batch of trees and then grass and then a batch of trees. I don't know why it grows that way, but it did. They had already gone through one, they got some fire, and they were getting ready to go through another. So they said, would you prep it for us? Sure. So we got some guys to drop a bunch of bombs in there and everything, and then they went in. And, oh, about a week-and-a-half later, they came back and they wanted to know: whose issue 1-2? So here, this is for you. Dropped a bag. And they brought me back a pair of North Vietnamese combat boots with feet in them.

Jim: Oh, my –

Van Dyke: It was, like, “what the fuck is that?” You should have seen it. We went in there right next to where one of your bombs went off. There were these boots sitting next to the tree. “You vaporized that motherfucker.” Went, “Whoah, shit!” So we drank about that and threw them in the trash, because they were pretty nasty at the time.

Jim: You bet -- I believe that.

Van Dyke: But he had to bring them back and show: these are yours. [Laughs.]

Jim: What happened after Cambodia?

Van Dyke: See, that whole thing was politically timed. They had – I think the U.S. had like a month they could in, then they had to get out. Well, what had happened, I guess, was we had scared the North Vietnamese off the border, and they all went into the interior, and the Khmer Rouge were then armed, so they started doing things with the local Cambodian Army. And so there were six of us who got called down to Saigon, and we were told we were going to work with the Cambodian Army henceforth. And we're going to get call-signed and we were going to report to headquarters 7th Air Force. And so –

Jim: Were you stationed in Vietnam or Cambodia then?

Van Dyke: In Vietnam. 'Cause there couldn't be any troops in Cambodia. So, first of all, the first mission I flew, I had my plane in Tienyen. I had to fly to Ben Wa to get a surline tank put on.

Jim: What's that?

Van Dyke: Extra 1000 gallons of gas. And there one of my buddies showed up, because he spoke French. And nobody spoke Cambodian. But the Cambodians spoke French, so we need to find people who could speak French to talk to the Cambodians who spoke French. You know, the Cambodians didn't speak English, and we didn't speak Cambodian, but we both spoke French, wherever we

could find somebody who did. So one of my buddies – his mom and dad were French. And he was a FAC, so he jumped in my back seat. And we took off, and the boss had gone over earlier, and he had a Cambodian Air Force lieutenant colonel in the backseat. So he found a way. Now, we still had our maps, but our maps were only good for about ten miles into Cambodia. And then the next set of maps we didn't have. And where we were going was a place called Cam Pon Tom, which was about one hundred miles into Cambodia. So we had no fricking clue where we were going or what we were looking for when we got there. And so was beyond the tack end at Ben Wa, so it was more than 150 miles out there. So you lost your tack end bearing in distance, and so, you know, away we go. And we went out there, and got the boss on the radio, and he had been out there with a Cambodian who knew where he was, and he said just go out there til you see the smoke. And there was town out there, and he says, I blew up this building and it's burning and I did that, and this is a guy whose call-sign – I talked to him in French – and then we were talking to Saigon on the HF radio. This was a nice thing about the OB-10, because we – the UHF was what you talked with with the fighters. We had -- the HF was, or VHF, wasn't really used in Vietnam. That was more civilian use. But we had that. We had the FM radio – that's what we talked with to the ground, 'cause that's what the ground guys carried. Then we had the short-wave radio, and that's what you'd talk to Australia with or whatever. But that's how you kept in touch with Saigon. So you'd talk with them real time. And so we were talking with them, or we had them on the radio, and they always wanted to listen. And all we had to do was just say: bring me this, and we got whatever it was. That's when you could really call your shots, was over there doing that. So from June through – I left like the first of November or so. That was what our call-sign was: "a rustic" and so we flew, first of all – well, I had to recover in Ton Sinu, then to go into the dark room with the map of the black lights. You know, with the grease pencils and things. And a bunch of generals and colonels, you know, watching. "Where were you, lieutenant, what did you do? What did you see?" You know: do your thing, brief them. And then we – Living at Ton Sinu was unbearable.

Jim: Why was that?

Van Dyke: There wasn't any place to live. There wasn't any place to eat. It was a ripped base. So we moved up to Ben Wa and worked there. It was kind of cool. One time – As a matter of fact I think it was, 'cause -- I turned around – they had put out the call that they need people who spoke French, and so the Air Force went all through their inventory for everybody who wrote down that they spoke French, and so we got cooks and clerks and shit showing up. And the first guy who showed up, they gave him to me to put in the back seat and tell them what to do. He's your French speaker. And that guy'd never flown before. He was a buck sergeant – Air Force buck sergeant. Poor bastard. [Laughs.] He got sick all the time, but he finally got over it. Anyway, I went over to the officers club to have breakfast. All my clothes were at Tien Yen. All I had was a flight suit that I had been wearing for about two days and it smelled pretty bad. And, you know, out

of Tien Yen everything was red anyway – kind of like a grungy color. And the Ton Sinu officers club did not allow you in there like that. And so I walked over, ‘cause I had just gotten back from five hours of doing this and then briefing a bunch of generals and things. So they kicked me out, which sort of pissed me off. So I walked right back over to the seventh headquarters, 7th Air Force tactical operations building, walked right back into the room where I just gotten done with these guys and said: “They won’t let me have breakfast.” And so the general said, “Colonel, you’re on take for this.” He goes, “Yeah.” So, I got – Here am I: I’m overtime, right? I got walked over to the officers club by a colonel, who walked in, said, “I want to see the club officer right now.” Who was, you know, some captain that – unrated guy, doing something. At any rate, he chewed him out: “You don’t know your ass from third base’s real combat zone right here, and you’re going to feed him breakfast, and you’re going to treat him right, and I want to watch it happen.” [Jim laughs.] You know, he got his guys going and he cleared off the table, set me down in the middle of the officers club. I’m the only guy in there that’s not in khaki uniform, right? So I’m sitting there, and I got two guys getting coffee and eggs and stuff, I’m loving it. And he goes, “Just let me know if anything’s wrong, Dave. Bye.” And he left. So I’m sitting there, getting the king’s treatment, and I look over there: there’s one of my buddies from flight school. And he’s in a – He’s got a C-130. And so they’d fly in, you know, once a month to get their combat pay, work on their air medal and things. And so he’s looking at me like, “What the hell?” It’s a whole bunch – his whole crew’s at the table. And so he gets up and says, “Hi, Dave! What are you doing?” “I’m getting the business. [Laughs.] I’m getting treated like – if you want to eat something, I’ll give it to you.” And so he sat down. I told him what was going on and all that stuff. He says, “Wow! No shit!” ‘Cause he was stationed out of, you know, Hawaii or something like that or somewhere in the states, just running freight and coming in to –

Jim: So you left Vietnam then in November of ’70? What happened to you then?

Van Dyke: I went to the air weather service, okay? And I flew a WC-135B.

Jim: What’s that?

Van Dyke: That’s a 707.

Jim: Okay.

Van Dyke: And I flew it all over the world. That was the one good thing about the job that there was no place I didn’t go. Other than that it was boring as hell.

Jim: What were your impressions about the Vietnam War, having spent a year there and seeing quite a bit of it?

Van Dyke: My impressions were, one, the classic it's a fucked up war. There were times where you knew that they knew that you were coming, you know. I blew up a lot of trees and a lot of monkeys doing that. There were – You know, like that time where they – they, being the unnamed, unranked secret guys – came out of Saigon and, you know, just grabbed a guy and said – you know, they were going to hang him. I mean, they're going after his ass if he couldn't show where that rocket hit. They were going to get him. What kind of shit's that? You know, you tell us to go out here, keep the bad guys from coming through the jungle here, and you do it, and someone gets pissed. There was a time I was down in a place called Kjurimom. That's over a place called Kjurimom, which at one time had been a resort in Cambodia. It was southwest of Phenom Penh. And it was on a like bluff thing that overlooked the jungle. You know, it was like all jungle to the north and to the south – it was about, oh, twenty miles to the ocean. At any rate, ah, the Cambodians had a whole group there, and the Cambodians, when their Army traveled, they traveled with ma and the kids and everything. So I checked in with them: "Hi, how's it going? I'm 'rustic-4' and here to make your day." And they smiled and all came out and waved, and I flew by low and rocked my wings and all that stuff. Well, the next day I went out there, and they were under fire. The bad guys had come up from the woods, and they had tried to get away, but they shot the bus. So it didn't work, so they were hiding under the bus, and you could see they had their bags packed up, and they were shooting from behind their bags and hiding under the bus. So you have troops in contact. And I called Saigon and I said, "I got a TIC here – these guys are getting their shit blown away, and we need to do something." "You're not going to get anything." "Why not?" "That's none of your business, lieutenant." So we didn't get anything, so I called Phenom Penh, 'cause, you know, we knew if the Cambodian Air Force – those guys would take a turn flying in our backseat and the T-28. And so, you know, we talked to them all the time. And so I got a hold of one of them. And he jumped in his T-28 and came out, and he had two bombs and his 50 caliber machine-gun. And I had my rockets and my sub .62s. And so together we did an air strike. And we chased them away a little bit and told the guys, "That's all we got." There's nothing else we can give you, and you flank us, the guy on the ground, and I think they tried to boogy, and the next day when I went – see, because I was the only one flying that section of the AO at the time, and they were all dead. They were all laying out on the road all spread out. It was just like – what the hell? You know, if you do this, are you going to sacrifice a unit, which was – you know, it wasn't a big one. It was like fifteen guys or something like that with their families. But there was about thirty people, and they were all killed, and they were all left right out in the road, and it sucked.

Jim: How were you treated when you came back from Vietnam?

Van Dyke: Eh, somebody thought I had a pretty good tan.

Jim: Is there anything else that we haven't covered, Dave, that we should cover?

Van Dyke: Gayle had said that, ah – You wanted to hear about drinking.

Jim: Yeah.

Van Dyke: We drank.

Jim: I know that. [Laugh.]

Van Dyke: The worst drunk I ever had over there was I had – this was – I was at Dum Wah, it was near the end, and I looked on the wall – and, you see, once a week at the Dun Wah officers club they had steak night. – and I looked at the wall and I was not scheduled to fly. Shit! I've got a day off tomorrow. So I went over there with a bunch of buddies, and I got a steak and we started drinking wine. And drank a lot of wine. And I passed out mentally long before I passed out physically. And they said I was having a good time giving the Filipino USO group a hard time about their singing. And then they said it was really funny, 'cause all of a sudden you just stood up, knocked your chair down, you turned around and started walking toward the back door, and of course all the Army guys came over for the USO show, too. And they said it was just like the parting of the seas: they all spread apart, you went hiking through the middle of them out the back door, and our maintenance officer found me. And I was out there puking all over myself, passed out, drunk and everything. And so he dragged – threw me in the back of the jeep, brought me home that night, and my roomie and him threw me in the shower and hosed me down for about an hour and threw me in bed. I woke up the next morning, you know, I felt bad. And I went out there and looked: somebody had changed the schedule and I had a ten o'clock take-off. So I went, "I can't fly!" "You've got to fly." "I'm drunk." "No you're not – go fly." So, okay. So I took off. I told the guy in the backseat, "You're going to have a fun day today. Hope you got nothing to do for the next five hours." And I decided – it was hot too – so I decided I was going to go where it was cold. And so I just let that thing 100% climb and climb and climb, and right about 17,000 feet I get 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

Jim: Cooled off, huh?

Van Dyke: And I had the little vents pointed at me, you know, and everything. It was freezing, and he had already gone to sleep, you know, passed out because of lack of oxygen. I was giving it this and kind of nodding and everything. In any event, I better go down a little. And then, you know, we came back down a little bit, woke up – boy, that's refreshing! [Laughs.] And I came back with no gas and a full load of ordnance. Didn't want to do that.

Jim: Did you have any impressions of the Vietnamese people?

Van Dyke: I, uh – I didn't trust them. I was probably scared of them. I got as the junior lieutenant going from Laikaida, Longthan – I was put in charge of the

maintenance vehicles and enlisted men. And so I got to drive in a jeep while everybody else got to fly the airplane down there. And being on the ground around Vietnamese people, I was not in my element. I was not comfortable. And I remember we had a truck break down, and the guys went down in a ditch to get some water to pour in the radiator, and three Vietnamese kids came over the hill. And, you know, the stories and things – I hadn't been there all that long: only about a month or so or two. Actually it was about two months, I think. And so, you know, I chambered a round in my M-16, and they heard it and ran like hell. And I scared the shit out of the little kids, but they were scaring the shit out of me and didn't know it, 'cause they just could come right up and throw a grenade at you and away you go. And that was the thing was kind of pervasive and you just didn't fucking know what was going to happen. And if you weren't super cautious, things did happen. And so that's one of the things that happened. One of the other things is that, I think, in what I watched and what I saw, unsafe acts killed as many people as VC.

Jim: Yup.

Van Dyke: One of the people I came over with, he flew into the ground. What he was doing is we've often joined up on a helicopter. You know, wave and take pictures of each other and then go wang. Well, he was showing off, 'cause the helicopter had some donut dollies in it. And he had brand new guy who had just shown up in his backseat. And they were flying into Ku Chi. And they said he did a split-S off the helicopter, where you roll the airplane on its back and then pull the nose in towards the ground. And he got just about vertical and he hit the ground. Because the helicopter had been going down and he had just been watching the helicopter and not paying attention to where he was. And his wife – you see, I had met him at Cannon, and then we went through Hurlburt together and the Philippines and so forth and the first couple nights. At any rate, so his wife didn't believe the Air Force when they said that he was killed, because she figured – he was a captain. He had been in some kind of intelligence thing prior to going to flight school. So she didn't believe that – she thought he had gone on some secret mission. And so I had to fly into Saigon, listen to this from some colonel and then they called her, put me on the phone with her. And they said, "Lieutenant, you're going to convince her that he's dead. That they ain't kidding around. And trying to tell her that, no, he really did crash – because they couldn't recover the body. I think they dug down there and found a piece of a finger, and that was confirmation, even though there were eye-witnesses that the plane had flown into the ground, and nobody objected. You know, they try to recover something. And you hit the ground like that, you're pretty much ash. You know, that happened, and that was pretty shitty, and it was shitty to have to talk to her. And trying to get her to finally realize that, you know, her husband was killed, and he was dead, and, you know, they had like three kids – you know, that sucked. And another guy – you know, he got shot down. Well, he got all thirty rounds from an AK clip in the cockpit. And there's only one way that that happens: that's by being ten feet off the ground. When you piss somebody off too many times, and he came

out from behind the tree and shot him. And, you know, what the fuck are you thinking? 'Cause, yes, you're going to die if you do that. You know, you can go by and you can scare them once, but, you know, pretty soon he wants to get on his way or eat his lunch or something, and you pissed him off and you stuck around. And you deserved to die, doing that sort of thing. And that was happening. I mean, goddammit, guys, use your head! You know, this is stupid, and that's how people get killed by stupidity. But at any rate –

Jim: Well, I think that was enough.

Van Dyke: Okay.

[End of side A, Tape 1]