

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN WEBB
Career Air Force, Cold War, Vietnam War
2001

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Webb, John “Jack,” (1936-). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 45 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John “Jack” Webb, a Durand, Wisconsin native, relates his twenty-year career with the United States Air Force overseas in Asia and stateside service that ended as a recruiter in Green Bay (Wisconsin). Webb talks about enlisting with two friends in 1954, basic training at Lackland Air Force Base (Texas), and radio repair school at Scott AFB (Illinois). He touches upon his repair duties with the 6147th Tactical Control Group in Korea and, after a year, being transferred to a base in Chandler (Minnesota) where he got married. Next in Hokkaido (Japan), he discusses Cold War work with a detachment of the 1st Shoran Beacon Squadron using short range navigation equipment in bomb training, and he touches on being told to avoid talking to the Russians there. He talks about duty with the 509th Bomb Group under Strategic Air Command doing repair of bomber equipment in Pease AFB (New Hampshire), and he states he did not enjoy it because “you were paperwork-bound.” He describes transferring to an Air Force Combat Control team at Fort Benning (Georgia), what Military Occupation Specialties were allowed on the teams, how the teams worked, training with all sorts of airplanes, the importance of packing their own parachutes, and survival and scuba training. He states, “We were there before the Seals. Matter of fact, I worked with the first Seal team.” He touches on being sent to Dyess Air Force Base (Texas) and becoming an air traffic controller. Webb addresses signing up for the First Air Commando Wing, a counterinsurgency unit based at Hurlburt Field (Florida), and he describes an exercise when his unit infiltrated a CIA base and “simulated” blowing up their trucks and airplanes. He emphasizes that they were trained to find alternate ways out of situations and not to make contact. He describes TDY (Temporary Duty Yonder) work in Udorn (Thailand) and Vientiane (Laos) as a “Spook” (secret agent). He discusses his role as a Spook air traffic controller with Operation Water Pump-Project 404, training pilots in the Royal Lao Air Force, and supporting Laotians fighting against the Pathet Lao. He recalls working for Kong Le, commander of the neutralist forces in Laos, and being told “in the event that anything happened, the United States government would disavow my existence.” He discusses inter-service cooperation and describes his only inter-service rivalry problem with an artillery colonel who insisted on blowing up tanks his own way. Webb recounts an incident where a commander of Group Mobile 16, Royal Lao Army let Webb go scouting positions in unfriendly territory though the commander knew and withheld information that there would be no air strike. Webb describes volunteering to go to Vietnam and his duties as an air strike controller with the 606th Air Command Squadron directing strikes against targets near the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He remembers

hearing Harry “Heinie” Aderholt (father of the counterinsurgency in Laos) and General William Momyer (Commander of 7th Air Force) argue about jet plane versus prop-plane capabilities. He mentions running jump training for the 6th Direct Air Support Flight in Misawa Shi (Japan) before being assigned as air support to the Republic of Korea Army after the USS Pueblo Incident. After service in Hawaii and at England AFB (Louisiana) he speaks of returning to the United States and applying for a recruiting position in 1971. He mentions that he was supposed to go to Madison (Wisconsin), but after the incidents on the UW campus he was assigned to Green Bay (Wisconsin) instead. After retirement, he speaks of attending college using the GI Bill to become a teacher, leaving teaching after being refused a job for being “too old,” and being part of China One Post and Shanghai Post of the American Legion.

Biographical Sketch:

Webb (b. July 17, 1936) served in the Air Force for twenty years. He served in Korea, Vietnam, and the secret war in Laos. Webb achieved the rank of Technical Sergeant before retiring.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001.

Transcribed by Telise Johnsen, 2010.

Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

- James: Okay, on the 13th of July, and it's 2001. Where were you born, sir?
- Jack: I was born in Durand, Wisconsin.
- James: Right. And, uh, where were you when Pearl Harbor showed up?
- Jack: I was in Durand, Wisconsin, about four years old, five years old, yeah.
- James: And you entered the military in '54, is that--?
- Jack: Right, fifteen days out of high school.
- James: What got you—you volunteer?
- Jack: Yeah.
- James: And, uh, this was the Air Force?
- Jack: Yup.
- James: Can you tell me why you chose the Air Force?
- Jack: Well, that was funny. There were three of us. In my graduating class I think there were 46 or 47 of us, and three of us decided to go in the military to get the Korean GI Bill, because we all wanted college and we couldn't afford it. In those days, you know—
- James: Yeah.
- Jack: Uh, so we went to see the Navy recruiter, and this was cutbacks right after Korea. So, they had a waiting list. We said, "No, we can't wait. We're ready to go." We spent the rest of the night arguing what branch we were going to go in. It went to a vote, and I lost. So [laughs], we all [flew out??] in the Air Force together.
- James: Where'd they send you?
- Jack: Lackland--San Antonio, Texas--Lackland Air Force Base.
- James: That's L-a-u-g-h—
- Jack: L-a-c-k-l-a-n-d.
- James: L-a-c-k-l-a-n-d. Where's that?

- Jack: San Antonio, Texas. In June.
- James: Great month to be in San Antonio [laughs].
- Jack: Well, basic training at that time was eleven weeks long. So we were there right, right through the hottest part of the year.
- James: Was it a busy place?
- Jack: Oh, yeah.
- James: I mean, there were a lot of men coming in the service at that particular year?
- Jack: Well not only that, but they had cut back on the other Air Force basic training bases.
- James: Ah, so more than the usual complement.
- Jack: So they were gearing it all towards San Antonio, taking it out of New York and California.
- James: Did they direct you into a subspecialty right off the bat, or did you just have general training and then did some tests and then they put you in [unintelligible]?
- Jack: Well, you took the tests prior to enlistment, and that qualified you for certain areas.
- James: So you knew where you were heading in the Air Force.
- Jack: Not really.
- James: Oh.
- Jack: Not at that time, because it wasn't any, there was no kind of guaranteed programs. The only thing that they guaranteed us is that the three of us would go through basic training together, and then after that you had no idea who was going to go where. And I had scored well in electronics so I ended up going to electronics school in Illinois.
- James: That's, uh, Scott Field?
- Jack: Yeah.

James: How long was that program?

Jack: That, as memory serves, I believe that was 32 weeks.

James: That's a long program.

Jack: Ground, it was ground radio repair.

James: Ground radio repair.

Jack: Yeah.

James: Okay. Oh, that was extensive training.

Jack: Yeah, that was a good school, and I left there in, uh, '55 and caught the troop ship to Korea.

James: What outfit were you in [when you got there??]?

Jack: In Korea?

James: Yeah.

Jack: I was with, uh, the 6147th Combat Support Group, which was the old Mosquito Outfit.

James: 6147th, that's the name of it?

Jack: Yeah.

James: 6-1-4-7. What is that, a squadron or a—

Jack: Combat, er uh, well, we're dealing with an old memory here, yeah.

James: Yeah. I have no [unintelligible]

Jack: Tactical, was it Tactical Control Group? Tac Control Group, I believe.

James: Tac Control Group, okay.

Jack: Yeah, and I worked on the base communications equipment, repaired that and the radio relay equipment for a telephone.

James: Would this require a lot of special [unintelligible]?

Jack: No. Most of the stuff we had was antiquated.

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: It was World War II radios and—

James: [Laughs.]

Jack: They didn't buy a whole lot of new stuff then. They were still using World War II stuff.

James: Whoa! What's the reason? Nothing else was going to happen--the last war was over, right?

Jack: Yeah, yeah.

James: Okay, and uh, and you stayed in Korea a year?

Jack: Yeah.

James: Then you went to Minnesota.

Jack: Yup.

James: What was there, [unintelligible] radar?

Jack: That was, yeah, aircraft control warning squadron.

James: Was there any new skills required here?

Jack: No. This was here again.

James: Did you repair, were you involved with repairing the radar?

Jack: Radios.

James: Just radios.

Jack: Yeah.

James: Not radar.

Jack: No. Radio and radar were two different skill fields.

James: Ah, oh I see. I know they're different, but I didn't know if they trained you for both.

Jack: Oh yeah.

James: Okay, and how was your duty there?

Jack: That was, uh, that was pretty good duty, very small place, uh, probably—

James: In the middle of nowhere?

Jack: Yeah, Chandler, Minnesota, down the southwest corner.

James: You were on the DEW [Distant Early Warning] Line.

Jack: Well, we were south of the DEW Line. The DEW Line—I didn't want to be on the DEW Line [laughs].

James: Oh, you didn't want it.

Jack: [Laughs] No, that's a little far north for me.

James: Yeah.

Jack: Ah, out there on the flat plain of Minnesota in the wintertime was bad enough.

James: Now that's still, I was going to say, that's no picnic either.

Jack: [Laughs] Yeah, but that was, that was very good duty, uh, like I said very few people—probably 110/120 people on the whole site.

James: Single then?

Jack: Well, I got married there.

James: Well that kept you warmer, anyway.

Jack: [Laughs]

James: Good. So, uh, and you were there for a year as I understand it.

Jack: Well, about eighteen months, I believe. Something like that, yeah.

James: And then you're back to Japan?

Jack: Northern tip of Hokkaido.

- James: Now, this is the place, “this is when I first became antagonized by that fleet.” When you started describing it I couldn’t figure out what the hell you had said. So we’ll have to go back there. Shoran Dispatch, is that the way—
- Jack: First Shoran Beacon Squadron--Detachment.
- James: You have to put that Shoran. Is that, that was an acronym, I assume.
- Jack: Shoran means ‘short-range navigation.’
- James: Right. I knew it was an acronym—
- Jack: Yeah.
- James: --but I didn’t know what it was for. Wait a minute, “short--?”
- Jack: “range navigation.”
- James: And what does that mean, for--?
- Jack: The purpose of the, uh, Shoran Detachment was to release bombs from airplanes while you’re sitting on the ground. So, we had three major vans which were portable equipment. Two vans that would be hooked to a tractor, like a tractor-trailer, and then one van that would sit in the back of a six-by[?], or a two-and-a-half-ton military truck. The one that sat in the six-by[?] was mine, that was my radio van, had all the radio equipment that we needed to talk to the airplanes.
- James: That’s my next question. Who were you talking to?
- Jack: Okay, very briefly I’ll give you this rundown.
- James: Okay.
- Jack: One van was the, the maintenance van with the radar, and the other van was the control van. Okay, in the control van was a console--[coughs], excuse me—that the radar would pick the airplane up and then it would feed it through this van to the console, and there’s a little stylus on there that would be the indicator of where the airplane is. And you’re looking at this console, you have a target and you have the IP, or initial point, where you pick up the aircraft, and you’re running down this particular line, depending on what the winds are and all that sort of thing. And then you have switches that when you throw the switches in the control van on this console they register in the aircraft and tell him when to release the weapon.

- James: And you were attacking where? Who did you attack in that--?
- Jack: Well, we, we were, we could see Sakhalin Island from Wakkanai, so we, we're 150—
- James: So these were all practice missions.
- Jack: Oh yeah. But we're 150 miles north of Vladivostok, so we're dealing with Siberia, Kamchatka, uh, Sakhalin Island—probably Vladivostok was a target at that time. But the training, this was all training, of course, this was Cold War stuff, '57/fifty-, or '58/'59. So we're running practice runs on the big lake in the middle of Hokkaido. This was the tar—the simulated target.
- James: Ah, I got it. But they didn't drop anything or anything.
- Jack: No, no, no. No weapons were actually released.
- James: No weapons [unintelligible]. Okay. All right, and you were there--. How was the duty there?
- Jack: That was good; that was very good, yeah.
- James: Never been to Hokkaido. I was, I spent my year in Korea and many trips to Japan, so but I was down to the bottom end of Chatsubo. I've been--
- Jack: Oh yeah, okay.
- James: --to Tokyo and I've been north of Tokyo and all around Japan, but I've never been to Hokkaido.
- Jack: It's, it's great, uh yeah, the people very, very nice. I went back to Japan later, had some very, very good experiences with the Japanese people. But Hokkaido, uh, we pretty much had the run of the village. Uh, they, it was a fishing village of course, small, and they had a movie theater and a couple of sake houses and, uh—
- James: It was essentially untouched by WWII, wasn't it?
- Jack: Pretty much, yeah.
- James: Yeah. I, uh, one of my high school classmates, B25, flew over there, did some bombing. Matter of fact he ended up crash landing in, in Russia.
- Jack: Hmm.

James: And these guys, if you don't know that story about— There was 260 guys who were interned in Russia--

Jack: Oh, I—

James: --during World War II.

Jack: I, I've heard of a number of those cases.

James: [unintelligible] or anything. They just were not let out.

Jack: Yeah.

James: The Russians were so xenophobic they were--my god!

Jack: Yeah.

James: [Laughs] Well, anyway.

Jack: Yeah.

James: So, but the duty was good and, uh—

Jack: Yeah. The only time we had any, any uh, well, it wasn't really a problem, but cautions. There was a, the Russians brought lumber into the bay at Wakkanai, floating behind a tug with a destroyer hull, and they'd tow it into the harbor. And when the Russians were in town then we'd be warned to stay away from them. But—

James: Were they there to jam your radar or anything?

Jack: No, they were doing that from their own positions, but they were there to sell lumber.

James: Oh, okay.

Jack: But of course, you know, it was Cold War days, and you don't talk to Russians. But we did anyway.

James: Okay. So were you there for a year?

Jack: Yeah. That was an isolated tour.

James: And then you went to New Hampshire.

Jack: Ooooooh—

James: Right?

Jack: Yeah.

James: Back to the cold weather.

Jack: SAC—Strategic Air Command.

James: Now—

Jack: [Laughs] That, oh--

James: How was that different?

Jack: That was, that was terrible. That was terrible.

James: Because?

Jack: Well, eh, you're paperwork-bound. Uh, when I came back from Japan I was a, a radio repairman, and this was an imbalanced skill. It was critical overseas; they needed 'em. But it was surplus in the ConUS. So—

James: You said what?

Jack: The Continental U.S. So as more people came back, uh, they'd cross-train them into something else, and I got stuck with that. So they decided to cross-train me into electronic counter measures. So I was repairing the, the jammers on B47 bombers.

James: --that were stationed there.

Jack: At Pease, New Hampshire, yeah, 509th Bomb Wing. As a matter of fact—

James: Yeah.

Jack: --the 509th was the outfit that dropped the atomic bombs on, uh, Japan.

James: Right.

Jack: --when it was the 509th Composite Group.

James: Now then tell me, you said a word there, now. "Pease," started with 'p', what's that?

Jack: P-e-a-s-e is the--

James: The name of the base?

Jack: --the name of the base, yeah.

James: Oh, P-e-a-s-e?

Jack: Pease, P-e-a-s-e Air Force Base, yeah.

James: Like “pease porridge hot,” that’s a British—

Jack: Yeah.

James: That’s what it is, now: Pease. Pease Air Base, right?

Jack: Yeah.

James: And where in New Hampshire?

Jack: Portsmouth.

James: Oh, near a navy base.

Jack: Kittery, Maine. Both my sons were born there.

James: [That’s?] I talked to some guys that were stationed in the navy--

Jack: East Coast Naval Prison was there too, at Kittery, yeah.

James: For supply sergeants and [unintelligible]

Jack: No, it was the—

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: It was the east coast prison for—

James: Okay. [These guys in the ship you saw?], was a rest home for supply officers.

Jack: [Laughs] Well, that could be.

James: Caught stealing, you know.

Jack: I never paid a visit there, so I don’t know.

James: [Laughs]

Jack: [Laughs]

James: Okay. So, uh, you didn't take to the new training, or it was boring, or what?

Jack: Well, it was, as I said, you were paperwork-bound. If you had a job to do on an aircraft, if an aircraft came back and had some problems with the ECM equipment, by the time you got your stuff together, got on a [bread, or a blood??] truck, got a ride out to the hinterland where the airplane was parked, did the job (took about 15 minutes), then you wait another 30 minutes or so to get a ride back. Then it takes you 30 minutes, 45 minutes, to fill out the paperwork, and then you can go on another job. So it was just, to me it was not a--

James: Productive, right?

Jack: --productive way to use my time.

James: Was it hard to repair things on a B37/47?

Jack: No.

James: That plane was not in service very long.

Jack: Oh, it was in for many years.

James: Was it?

Jack: Just never used in—

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: Never delivered a weapon in anger. That and the B36 I think were probably the only two—

James: Yeah.

Jack: --that didn't.

James: I was with a guy that flew a B36.

Jack: Yeah.

James: [Laughs] He said that was a strange airplane.

Jack: [Laughs] Ten engines?

James: All those engines, right. [Laughs] Okay, now—

Jack: But I had a heck of a time. I uh, that, that was a bad time. I just did not take to SAC.

James: Maybe that's because you'd just been married, and your wife didn't like it there.

Jack: No, didn't have anything to do with her.

James: Oh, okay.

Jack: [Laughs]

James: All right, so your next move is startling, here.

Jack: Well, the next move was my way out.

James: That's why you got into the, the heavy stuff.

Jack: Yeah. I had heard about Air Force Combat Control back in '57.

James: Yeah, I don't know about this [unintelligible]. "Air Force"?

Jack: "Combat Control." Let me give you a real quick history of Combat Control. In uh, when the Air Force became a separate service as a result of the National Security Act of 1947, it was the responsibility, one of the responsibilities of the new Air Force was deliver airborne people, to drop Army paratroopers. So, after this went on for a while--and there had always been a problem of getting paratroopers to the point on the ground where you want them instead of dropping them two miles away, or in a tree, in a woods, or in a lake or ocean, or whatever (which they did all of them)—[coughs] the Air Force said, "Okay, if we're going to drop these people we're going to use our own pathfinders." So in 1953 they formed the Air Force Combat Control teams.

James: Yeah. Now this is, these are teams, uh, small teams--

Jack: Yeah.

James: --or is this part of a large unit, uh?

Jack: It's basic, the basic structure at that time was a thirteen-man team.

James: And they had several of these teams, in other words?

Jack: Yeah, uh--

James: Okay. One of those is a thirteen-man team, that's--.

Jack: Well, that would be the basic structure. We, we branch away from that a little bit later, but as it was initially set up, uh, these, this team would be trained to lead an airborne assault with any Army airborne unit.

James: So it was, these were-- Is this a nice, fancy name for a pathfinder?

Jack: Yes. Yeah, it's the Air Force name for a pathfinder.

James: See now, I've learned a lot today. [Laughs]

Jack: [Laughs]

James: Okay, yeah. I interviewed this friend in Madison, a pathfinder on D-Day.

Jack: Uh huh.

James: Dropped the stick [??] with the [eureka??], you know.

Jack: Yeah, yeah.

James: So anyway.

Jack: Uh—

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: Uh, then—

James: What type of training did you get into here?

Jack: Well, went to the Army's jump school at Fort Benning.

James: You had to pass the jump school?

Jack: Oh yeah. Everybody had to go. That was a basic requirement. You had to be jump qualified.

James: Oh, yeah.

- Jack: [Coughs] You can't-- You know, that's [laughs], that's a necessity.
- James: I know, but you were repairing radios, for Christ's sake. You weren't [laughs] jumping to repair a radio.
- Jack: Well, here's where we branch out. Here's where we branch out at little bit. In the Combat Control teams there were two AFSCs, Air Force Specialty Codes, MOS. There were only two that were accepted on the team. One was a radio mechanic and the other was a control tower operator.
- Now, so that you understand what that is, we maintained all of our own equipment. We kept our own radios and everything. We maintained our own parachutes. We packed our own chutes; we packed all of our own gear. We were self-sustaining.
- James: Self-sustaining, right.
- Jack: And, once we went into an area to establish a drop zone or a landing zone--we also had the capability of landing airplanes, night and day. So that's when the tower operators came in. The tower operator would ostensibly be the guy who worked the radios. But of course it didn't work that way, because the radio mechanics had to also do that. So we ended up with the radio mechanics not only maintaining the equipment but also controlling air traffic. And we had the air traffic controllers who could only control air traffic.
- [Laughs] I see this is becoming a bit confusing. That's just the way it worked out. Uh, it wasn't, it wasn't planned that way, and today it doesn't exist that way. Today, Combat Control has its own Air Force Specialty Code, and it's neither radio mechanics or tower operators. It's its own code, and everybody's trained to do everything. [Coughs]
- James: Did you [unintelligible] aircraft?
- Jack: [Coughs] Anything that would carry troops or equipment.
- James: So you didn't have any special arrangement to configure the aircraft, where you'd--?
- Jack: No, no. We had, uh--
- James: Essentially C47s, or bigger?
- Jack: C124s, C130s--

James: Wow!

Jack: --123s, Caribous, C46s.

James: Well, now we're talking about a little different sizes here then.

Jack: Oh yeah.

James: The 130 could carry a couple of those others, you know.

Jack: Well, we uh, we did them all. Uh, I've landed them on dirt at night. Uh--

James: That C130 is still [very nice??]

Jack: Oh yeah.

James: Very [??] airplane. It could really do [laughs] a lot of different things. You know, they [ended up as?] gun ships [laughs].

Jack: Oh yeah. Well the C47 was a gun ship too, and the C119. But the 130, of course, with its ability to stay in the air for a long time, and with its power, could carry a lot more guns. I mean, they even had 105 Howitzers in them.

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: Well, if you've ever seen one of those things fire, it's just a red line from the airplane to the ground.

James: Is that right?

Jack: And you just don't see how anything can survive being underneath that. It's just unbelievable. But, to get back to where we were—

James: Right.

Jack: Uh—

James: [unintelligible] Tell me what you did. Tell me what type of training you went through next.

Jack: Well, we were trained in, in parachute techniques of course, and then we had to train to maintain all of our equipment, including the parachutes—repair them and pack them and—

James: Was that [unintelligible]?

Jack: Oh yeah. We preferred that.

James: No kidding.

Jack: Yeah. We had our own—

James: We got away from that, you know. We haven't had airplanes; I mean, they have parachute packers.

Jack: Oh yeah. They had them then too.

James: Oh, then(?).

Jack: But we preferred to maintain our own equipment.

James: There must be a reason?

Jack: Trust [laughs].

James: Trust?

Jack: Well, we used them a lot more. You know, the base—

James: It required probably more personnel and—

Jack: Well, the base parachute shops would pack parachutes for the aircraft, for the crews.

James: Okay.

Jack: Okay. Very seldom any of these were ever used. So there would be a time limit. If memory serves, it was 60 days or 90 days and they had to be repacked.

James: Oh really.

Jack: So they would pull them out, rotate the parachutes, and all they would do all day is pack parachutes.

James: Is there, what was the reason for the repacking?

Jack: Well, to make sure that they don't mildew and deteriorate and that sort of thing. They're nylon, so, especially if you're in a humid area, you want those things broken open and—

James: Oh, it's a risk—

Jack: Oh *yeah*. I've seen, I've seen canopies disintegrate, you know.

James: You're kidding.

Jack: No.

James: From just being in moist conditions too long.

Jack: Yeah, just simply hadn't been maintained properly.

James: Well, see, I learned something.

Jack: We, uh, we preferred to have our own. Then of course we had to, we had all the weapons training--and because we didn't know what units we're going to be with, what weapons you're going to be handling, and that sort of thing—so uh, you go through all of that and your survival schools, survival training [coughs], scuba training.

James: Scuba training?

Jack: Oh yeah, because one of our means of deployment was not parachute, but by submarine.

James: Geez, you're turning into Seals here.

Jack: Well, we were there before the Seals. Matter of fact, I worked with the first Seal team, Seal 2.

James: Did you?

Jack: Well, Seal 2 and 1 were formed at the same time in 1962, and I worked with Seal 1 on their first FTX. Uh--let's see, was it 1 or 2?--out of Norfolk.

James: That's [unintelligible].

Jack: One—and the other was in California.

James: The one in Norfolk is [unintelligible].

Jack: I think that was Seal 1. And they did their first FTX in Florida in, uh, '63, and I worked with them on that operation. That was when they started.

James: Well, they did sort of half [unintelligible]. What about this jumping out of an airplane then? Did you take to that?

Jack: Oh yeah, yeah. That was, uh—

James: That's a rush.

Jack: Well, not really. It's a mode of transportation, you know. It gets you from point A to point B.

James: But you took to that jumping out okay?

Jack: Well, everybody did to maintain on the teams. If a person didn't do the jumping, they didn't—

James: Right. But did you adapt to that pretty well?

Jack: Oh yeah, yeah.

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: I didn't give it a whole lot of thought.

James: Oh really?

Jack: I just saw it as, you know, it's a step that you have to do to do this job.

James: But you're a married man now.

Jack: Um hmm.

James: That always gives people more pause, when you start to think about others than yourself. I was wondering whether that influenced you to be more concerned, or--

Jack: No, not at all. Because, here again, we maintained our own equipment. We had great confidence in it.

James: I see. So, you were just totally confident in what you were doing.

Jack: Yeah.

James: That's a sign of good training, I'll tell you.

Jack: We, we had some good people. Our training, most of our training was self-contained, as far as doing the operations and practicing setting up drop zones and landing zones and training jumps and all that sort of thing. We were a self-contained unit. We did our own training. [Coughs]

James: Wasn't your enlistment up by this time and you've been re-enlisting?

Jack: Oh yeah, yeah. I'd re-enlisted a number of times.

James: Generally when you enlist you have, what, four years?

Jack: Yeah.

James: Then after four years you had always—at this point, had you assumed that you were going to put in thirty?

Jack: No. I was looking at twenty.

James: Twenty?

Jack: Yeah.

James: You enjoyed the military life?

Jack: Pretty much, yeah.

James: Pretty much.

Jack: Yeah.

James: Okay.

Jack: Got to do some curious things.

James: Yeah. I understand. [unintelligible] Okay. I remember--where are we now, now uh--

Jack: Well, I was at--

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: Yeah, when I got into Combat Control, I went to Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, Abilene, and when I got there, there was only one other guy there. He was a chief warrant officer named Roundtree. He was the team leader. So for 18 months he was the team leader and I was the team. [Laughs]

James: [Laughs] What was your rank at that time?

Jack: I was a three-striper.

- James: Three striper, and he was a chief—
- Jack: Chief warrant officer.
- James: Chief warrant officer, okay.
- Jack: Yeah, yeah, and this was when they were phasing out warrant officers in the Air Force.
- James: I was going to say, how'd you get along with him?
- Jack: He was a wonderful guy, just, oh, just a fantastic guy.
- James: Oh, that's nice.
- Jack: He was a silver star holder from WWII, infantryman. He's still alive in Florida. He's having, he got a big chunk of his head shot off in WWII and, uh, he's having some problems with that now.
- James: Oh, sorry to hear it.
- Jack: He's like 80. He's in the early eighties.
- James: Yeah, yeah.
- Jack: And uh, but, he's just, he's just uh—Well there are two people that I, two officers I met in the military that to this day I will not refer to them by their first name, and he's one of them. That's how much I respected him. Just a wonderful person.
- James: Okay. So, what, where are we at now? This is, basically you're (now?) in the '60s.
- Jack: Yeah. I was down at Abilene, and about '63—I got there in uh, yeah, I got there in January of '62. In the middle of 63 [coughs], I had to take a trip over to Hurlburt Field, Florida, uh, to pick up some radios, and they had a team over there.
- Now here's where we have a big split in Combat Control, because sitting at Hurlburt Field, Florida, was the old First Air Commando Wing, which had started out as Jungle Jim in the—'60-'61. And they had a Combat Control team, and they did a totally different operation. They were strictly counterinsurgency, and when I took that trip over there I took a look at these guys and saw what they were doing, and I said, "I gotta do this."
- James: That was more exciting?

Jack: Oooo, I mean, these guys were doing some good stuff.

James: This is about a death wish.

Jack: [Laughs] Nah, I just wasn't extremely bright.

James: [Laughs]

Jack: [Laughs] So, I went back over to—well, the First Air Commando Wing was building up, and they were having a hard time getting people and all that sort of thing--super-secret operation. So I went back to Abilene, took the—er, yeah—took the radios over there, and put in an application for the First Air Commando Wing, and—

James: First Air Commando Wing.

Jack: Yeah. Got a telephone call, said, "Pack your bags. Pack your family, and get over here. We'll send orders when we get time."

James: Where in Florida was this?

Jack: Hurlburt Field, Fort Walton Beach.

James: Oh.

Jack: Hurlburt: h-u-r-l--

James: Hurlburt

Jack: --b-u-r-t. That's at Fort Walton Beach, about 30 miles east of Pensacola.

James: Yep, okay. So, did they give you any [unintelligible] into clearing you?

Jack: Oh well, you, your normal security clearances are done by OSI, uh, Office of Special Investigations. Uh, once you got into counterinsurgency your name went right up as far as it would go.

James: That's what I asked. I didn't know whether they had screened you before they accepted you into this unit.

Jack: They'd accept you, then screen you, and if there was something wrong, you're gone.

James: Hey, [unintelligible]. [Laughs] You do all this, and you can't afford to be [put out?]. Okay. So now that you--was that a good move for you?

Jack: Oh, it was excellent, excellent.

James: Because it was more stimulating, and you [unintelligible]?

Jack: Much more stimulating, much more work to do. Uh, where we sat on our butts a lot of times, uh, here there was so much training to do, and—

James: What kind of training? I'm missing this.

Jack: We worked hand-in-glove with Special Forces, and uh, when the Seals finally got their act together we started working with them too, worked with Marine Recon and ANGLICO [Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company].

James: Practiced those small little missions into the jungle and get in/get out, kinda become more proficient in that sort of stuff?

Jack: I took, uh, seven or eight guys one time--a training operation in Florida--and infiltrated CIA's base and blew up all their airplanes and their motor pool.

James: Blew 'em up?

Jack: Simulated.

James: Oh yeah, good. I was going to say, there's a limit here.

Jack: Yeah. We put simulated blocks on all their airplanes, every third truck in their motor pool, on their control tower, and told them we were coming.

James: Seven, seven guys?

Jack: Yeah.

James: You have to cut some wire to get in there?

Jack: No. We couldn't destroy any property.

James: Well, how did you get in the base, then, pretend you were somebody else?

Jack: [Laughs] Stand there and make a noise like a tree, you know, they can't see you.

James: [Laughs]

Jack: [Laughs] Well, we made a night jump into an area, fairly close proximity, and then infiltrated.

James: Well, can we get back to this fencing? You had to get across the fence. I'm sure they had their big fenced ground. So you had to go under or over that fence or cut it, and if you cut it that would set off an alarm.

Jack: We went right through the gate.

James: You had killed a guard?

Jack: [Laughs] No, he never even knew we were there.

James: Come on, now. How can you do that?

Jack: He wasn't paying attention.

James: I guess not! Seven guys.

Jack: We watched him, we watched him for about an hour before we made any move. He was standing around picking his nose and scratching his butt, so we just took our time and went in.

James: But he's standing there.

Jack: Well, he's in a little hut--

James: Oh! I see.

Jack: --and he's not paying attention.

James: [unintelligible], in other words. Okay. I'm getting it now. [Laughs] Okay. It's just—you could get shot, you know, he'd a shot you. You didn't know whether--

Jack: Oh, he had live ammo, yeah.

James: Right, that's what I say. He would have shot you--

Jack: We knew that.

James: --if he would have seen you. Now, that's the price you pay, right, for being big time?

Jack: [Laughs] Well, we didn't pay any price. We went in and did it and went back out. And, you know, no problems.

James: He didn't see you coming out either.

Jack: They never even knew we were there till the next day.

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: 'Course, we wouldn't have had to worry about it. If that had been an actual situation, that place would have been sky high.

James: Of course.

Jack: He wouldn't have been paying attention anyway. We could have gone out any place we wanted to.

James: You would have taken it out first, right?

Jack: Yeah. [Coughs]

James: Oh, by the way, before we leave that, were you prepared to stick a knife in him?

Jack: Of course.

James: I mean, that was your weapon of choice in that situation.

Jack: No, well—

James: In self- [?]-

Jack: Well, I don't know that there's any weapon of choice. The thing that was hammered into us is, "When you go into a situation, you have another way out, and then you have an alternate way out." The last thing you want is contact.

James: Right.

Jack: Until the mission's ready to go. See, we're there before the mission. So we don't want contact with anybody. So the whole idea is if it looks like things are compromised, you have a way out, and then you have an alternate [laughs] way out, because you do *not* want to make contact.

James: I see. Okay.

Jack: But, uh, if everything turned to slop, then you have weapons and you use them and get the hell out the best way you can.

James: How long was the training in Florida?

Jack: It was perpetual.

James: How long—

Jack: The training never ended.

James: Okay. How long were you there training? I'll say it differently.

Jack: How long was I in Florida?

James: Yeah.

Jack: Okay. I was there two and a half years, yeah, two and a half years. And then I went to, uh, Thailand.

James: Well, I had you going to Florida in '63 and then in '64 going to Laos. That's what's on here.

Jack: Well, I was TDY [Temporary Duty Yonder] out of Florida.

James: Aha!

Jack: That was a detachment of the First Air Commando Wing. That was Detachment 6.

James: Okay. That's a TDY. That's a--

Jack: Yep.

James: Okay, that clears up another thing. [unintelligible] You were over there for, what, how long, six weeks?

Jack: Six months.

James: Six months and then back to Florida.

Jack: Yeah.

James: Okay.

Jack: Now, that was when I made the first contact with CIA and Air America and those folks, 'cause I went to Laos then. We, we, actually we went into Udorn, Thailand.

James: Udorn—

Jack: Udorn, not Ubon.

James: Udorn, yeah. I knew there was something else that started with and “U”—

Jack: Udorn is north of Ubon. It’s up close to Mankai[?]/Mount Kai[?], toward the Mekong River.

By the time I got there--this was the original what was called Water Pump Deployment. Uh, this was--on paper and according to Washington, the purpose of the Detachment was to train Lao pilots in T28s and to turn T28s over to the Royal Lao Air Force. Uh, it broadened a bit [laughs] in scope [laughs], in that we ended up with Air America people flying them and Air Force people flying them and Thais being paid to fly them and—

James: What, the T28, they had [unintelligible]—

Jack: The T28, which was—

James: The T28 was a—

Jack: Training air--, “T” designating “trainer.”

James: Right, I know.

Jack: But, uh, it became the primary—

James: That was a jet?

Jack: No, no. This was a “recip”--reciprocal engine, propeller, tricycle gear.

James: I’m trying to envision it, because, uh, seems like a Cessna 172[?].

Jack: No, no. I’ll show you a picture of one.

James: Okay.

Jack: Got one in here someplace.

James: [unintelligible]

[Sharp sound of something snapping or dropping.]

James: Can I get it?

Jack: But what happened, when we got to, when we sent the initial Water Pump Deployment--

James: Water Pump was the name of an operation?

Jack: The code name. The code name for the deployment.

James: Code name.

Jack: Uh, also part of what was in the vernacular of that area—Laos, northeast Thailand—was part of Project 404, which was a classifica--, government classification. [Coughs] But when we got to, to Udorn, the only people there was an outfit called Bird & Son, which was an aviation outfit hired by the CIA along *with* Air America. So they had two companies working, supporting them with air, which gave them the capability of dropping rice and, and uh, weapons, ammunition, and everything that the people needed in northern Laos to combat the terrible bad guys.

James: Now, let me see. What was going on in Laos, because, uh, there was two forces, I mean, good guys and bad guys there, right?

Jack: Yeah.

James: But those are Loation [mispronounced, with “o” before “a”] Loations [mispronounced again].

Jack: No, the Vietnamese were involved also.

James: Oh. The bad guys in Laos were Vietnamese. Is that correct, or—

Jack: And Pathet Lao, which were the Lao--uh, the leader of the Lao communist forces was a guy named Souphanouvong. His half-brother, Souvanna Phouma, was the leader of the good guys. The neutralists were led by Kong Le.

James: I see.

Jack: I was at Kong Le’s headquarters. He was--he swung. He did a coup, overthrew the government when he was a captain. Yeah, he commanded a parachute battalion at Vientiane, the administrative capitol. Overthrew the government and put Phoumi Nosavan in, and he uh, uh, made himself a general and commanded the neutralist forces.

Then he swung—because the United States didn’t want Phoumi Nosavan in, they cut off the aid to Laos, because they wanted Souvanna Phouma

back in. Well, then everybody swung over and accepted aid from Russia, you know, from the Soviet Union.

So then Kong Le is a bad guy, and he moved up on the Plain of Jars [laughs], and then a, about a—less than a year after he made his swing back toward being a neutralist, I was at his headquarters in Bang Dien[??] and talked with him.

James: Need a program to keep track of this scenario. [Laughs]

Jack: Oh, I haven't gotten into half the names. [Laughs]

James: [Laughs] [unintelligible] languages.

Jack: But, but it was, it was kind of a touchy situation.

James: What were you doing for him? I mean, we can get that right down.

Jack: Directing air strikes from the ground.

James: To his opposition?

Jack: Yeah. We were, uh—

James: I mean, theoretically the United States was not involved at all.

Jack: Right. Yeah. We were told—I, I never—I've heard a lot of people who have been there say that they were given a cover story as to why they were there and blood chips[??] and all that sort of thing. I never saw any of that stuff. I was never given a cover story, uh, I was simply told that in the event that anything happened the United States government would disavow my existence. That was all I was told.

James: You were expendable.

Jack: Well, we all were. Everybody is.

James: If anything happened to you, you were erased in the records.

Jack: Yeah.

James: You were not the--

Jack: Right.

James: --wounded. What a comforting feeling.

Jack: Well, that was part of the job. That didn't have any effect on anyone that went in there.

James: It didn't.

Jack: No. I never ran into one person—

James: That was the assumption that you're working under, that you were—

Jack: Well sure. That was, that's why you took the job.

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: I mean, that's not the purpose you took the job, but that went along with the job, along with all the big bucks—

James: Big bucks?

Jack: [Laughs]--the big bucks that a staff sergeant drew. [Laughs]

James: I see. Okay. So, how was living in Udorn?

Jack: It was great, because it wasn't a military base yet. The village was untouched; it was not destroyed. The bars and all the prostitutes and stuff weren't there. This, you know, what normally follows a military buildup.

James: Sure. [unintelligible]

Jack: Uh, it was as close to pristine—Well Vientiane, actually, Vientiane, Laos, the administrative capitol right across the river, that was right out of "Terry and the Pirates." It was unbelievable: everybody running around, the Caucasians, all running around in civilian clothes. *Nobody*, the last thing anybody does is ask anybody what they do for a living. You don't even ask.

James: Everybody was doing something they shouldn't talk about.

Jack: One word covered everybody, was a "spook."

James: Was a "spook." We're all spooks, literally?

Jack: Yeah. You're a spook, yeah. That's the word that covered everybody.

James: And some were working directly from the military like you, and others were working for the CIA, and uh—

Jack: Army Special Forces.

James: Sure. You're all mixed?

Jack: Oh yeah, everybody working together.

James: Did you have selective missions, each of you on a different mission?

Jack: Yep. Sometimes there'd be overlap, but nothing that interfered with any operations.

James: So when we go down to the bar and we sit around and have a beer—

Jack: Uh huh.

James: --did we, were we chums with those folks?

Jack: Oh, absolutely, yeah.

James: Yeah. So you didn't, you weren't worried about dropping any secrets, and they weren't worried about it.

Jack: Socialized and—

James: Did you, you just didn't talk about that.

Jack: If anything came out during a social period it stayed there. It never went beyond that.

James: Okay. So you did develop a camaraderie with these guys.

Jack: Oh, sure.

James: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah. But all the bad guys knew who we were.

James: Yeah, there was no—

Jack: They had pictures of us.

James: Oh, really?

Jack: I saw Time Magazine in 1964 that had my picture in it. They knew. The only people that didn't know was the Americans.

James: [Laughs.]

Jack: Everybody else knew. We had the Russian Embassy right there. We had the Chinese Embassy right there. There was a contingent of Pathet Lao forces there that had a—

James: This was in Udorn?

Jack: No, this was in Vientiane, Laos.

James: Vientiane. Okay.

Jack: The administrative capitol.

James: Yeah.

Jack: There were three capitols. Luang Prabang was the royal capitol; that's where the king hung out. Then the administrative capitol where the government was, at Vientiane, and then Cang Chai was the Pathet Lao capitol.

James: Cang Chai, how do you spell that?

Jack: Cang Chai: c-a-n-g c-h-a-i. But they subsequently moved that to Sam Nua, but at that time it was at Cang Chai.

James: So, was it—were you busy when you were there?

Jack: Yeah, pretty much. We did a little bouncing back and forth, Thailand to—

James: Specifically, what were you doing?

Jack: Well—

James: I mean, you were bringing material in, or taking people out?

Jack: Oh, you were, we brought airplanes into Udorn and subsequently turned them over to the Royal Lao Air Force and then brought more T28s, usually from Vietnam, because they were being replaced in Vietnam by the A1s.

James: Who make's that airplane, by the way?

Jack: I think it's North American. I'm not really sure.

James: Yeah, it sounds—

Jack: Yeah. Don't quote me on that. I think it's North American.

But, uh, one very interesting thing happened, on that deployment--uh, this was directed out of Washington—and if memory serves there were about 35 of us or so on the deployment. And super secret--you can't tell your family, you can't tell anybody--just, you're gone. Okay. So we all got in the airplane, and we went.

James: This is from Florida.

Jack: Yeah. And, uh, we got settled in at Udorn; didn't have any facilities, so we lived downtown, rented houses downtown. And, few months, and people are starting to run out of money. So the detachment commander went down and saw the local banker and made arrangements for guys to cash checks to get some money.

Well, guess what happened to security. That check clears, goes back to his bank at home, and [laughs] here's his wife with his cancelled check: "Bank of Siam, Udorn, Thailand." [Laughs]

James: No more secrets.

Jack: [Laughs] No. Guess where we are now. [Laughs] I thought that was very humorous. Ah!

We uh, we were running that equipment in, but also at the same time there was a military operation taking place to clear the highways of the bad guys, Highway 7 and 13, which were the main—

James: In Laos.

Jack: Yeah, in Laos. So I had to go—

James: You're clearing them because you—of Viet--North Vietnamese, I assume.

Jack: Yeah, and Pathet Lao. And I was up at Moung Soui, which is right off the west side of the Plain of Jars, and uh, we had three F105 batteries up there.

James: "Moung Soui," you gotta give me that one.

Jack: M-o-u-n-g--

James: M-o-u-n-g.

Jack: Second word: s-o-u-i.

[End of side A: approx. 30 minutes]

Jack: Yeah, we had three 105 batteries and one single 155 gun, which we couldn't use because it would bury itself. But the, uh, these guns were operated by Thai. See, they could bring Thai army in there for deniability, because if this guy gets zapped you can't tell him from a Lao, and northeast Thailand is populated mostly by Lao people anyway, because of their history of changing the borders and everything. So, the general population there was Lao. [Coughs] But there were a lot of Thais involved in the, in the war in Laos.

James: That's what I'm--

Jack: They were paid by the U.S. government.

James: Yes.

Jack: Yeah. But there was, uh, there was one day I was there and this, this Army, this U.S. Army light [lieutenant] colonel shows up, and he's got six or seven brand new second lieutenants trailing behind him, and this guy's an old WWII hard-ass artillery guy.

Well, just across this knoll, and not too far away the bad guys had three T34 Russian tanks, and we knew they were there, so we decided, "Well, let's blow 'em up." So I was going to have the T28s come in. Well, we took a walk up there first, and we looked at them, and we saw where they were and said, "Okay, this is, this is a piece of cake." So I went back and this light colonel was there with his second lieutenants, and I told him we were going to bring some T28s in and blow those tanks up.

"No, you're not. No, you're not. I'm going to get them with my artillery." And he's goes into this spiel how close air support can't hit any targets anyway and, you know, being of that old mentality, which I understand and don't have a problem with—

[TAPE CUTS OUT BRIEFLY HERE.]

--I don't know whether he was trying to convince himself or impress his second lieutenants, but he got about two rounds out of the tubes of those 105s, and they backed the tanks up—

James: Oh, lord!

- Jack: --and just *let* us have it for a solid hour, just kept pouring it on for a solid hour. This guy never did touch them, but that was the only inter-service conflict that I encountered in the two tours that I did. But, and I don't fault this fellow. He was an old guy, and he was zeroed in on that artillery is the kingpin and, and "air can't do anything," and you weren't going to get that out of his mind, and--
- James: So many army people are like that. They fight the next war with the last war equipment, you know.
- Jack: Well, that's what everybody did in Southeast Asia. The Air Force had its same problems with that, uh, when you get into [William W.] Momyer, I mean, this guy's a jet airplane Air Force, and there's no room for— He thinks that, or thought that, that jets could do the same job as a prop-driven aircraft in a counterinsurgency.
- James: Really?
- Jack: Yeah. (But he's another story; I'll get into him in a minute.) But, uh, then, of course they, the tanks disappeared for that, for a good long period of time.
- James: Then your targets are gone now.
- Jack: Oh sure, yeah. It was, it wouldn't have done me any good to call air then.
- James: No.
- Jack: Uh, on one other occasion the, uh-- The highways met north of Luang Prabang in a place called Moung Kassey, which is just a tiny little village.
- James: How do you spell that?
- Jack: M-o-u-n-g.
- James: Oh, same. Then "moung"—
- Jack: Yeah. "Moung" means "village" or "town."
- James: Really?
- Jack: "Kassey": K-a-s-s-e-y.
- James: K-a-s-s-e-y.
- Jack: Yeah.

James: [unintelligible] names.

Jack: We're going to get into some more, too; no question. [Laughs]

James: [Laughs]

Jack: This, uh, we were, I was having an interview with the, uh, commander of Group Mobile 16, Royal Lao Army, and I asked him if he needed any air support and where he needed it and when he needed it. And he said, "Yes, I need some right now, and I need it at the junction of highways 7 and 13." [Coughs] And with me was this Air Force captain whose name shall remain anonymous--which you'll figure out in a minute why. He and I stood there, said, "Okay, let's do this," went over, got on the radio, called down to the, uh, Air Attaché's Office in Vientiane, laid on T28s for the whole next day. I got a Air America helicopter to take me over the top of this mountain and drop me off, and, uh, I didn't have an interpreter, just me all by myself, had a radio and a couple of canteens and a carbine.

Next morning airplanes don't show up. I've got all these little rice puffs of smoke from these little rice cooking fires that, I mean, all I'd had to do is just say, "Hit any smoke." It's all bad guys, you know, and airplanes never showed up. Then the helicopter who was supposed to come get me out of there never showed up.

So pretty soon here comes another helicopter, and he's bringing a 75-pack in. [Coughs] So I bummed a ride with him, went back to Moun Soui and I walked up to this captain, and I said, "Where are the airplanes?" He said, "I don't know." So I said, "Well, I'll find out."

So I went down, I went right on down to Vientiane, and I walked into the detachment commander and I said, "Where were the airplanes?" He said, "Well, didn't the captain tell you? That place isn't going to be hit for three days. We weren't sending any airplanes up there."

This guy *knew* it, and let me go out there on that mountain, no "friendlies" within fifteen miles. [Laughs] What a, what a moron. But, honest to God, this guy, uh, and then lied about it.

James: Strange.

Jack: Yes.

James: Did you figure out any reason for that bizarre behavior?

Jack: He was just a bizarre person.

- James: You should have killed him.
- Jack: I promised him I would. I said, “If you come out of this tent I’ll shoot you.” But he, uh, he certainly didn’t go with me.
- James: Strange.
- Jack: But, you seldom run into that sort of thing. Then, uh, what I found interesting when I got to Udorn--this was prior to the Gulf of Tonkin incident—the airfield was already built. The tower was built. The long jet runways were built. The taxiways were there. Parking ramps were all built prior to the Gulf of Tonkin.
- James: That was in ’65.
- Jack: August ’64.
- James: Oh.
- Jack: I found that very interesting, that they had the foresight to build that airfield that would become one of the major—
- James: I was gonna say—
- Jack: --airfields in the whole area.
- James: Okay.
- Jack: Then I left there and went back to [excuse me] back to Florida; kinda milled around for a while, did more training, and then in ’66, early ’66, I volunteered for Vietnam actually. And as it turned out they were building a unit at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand--“NKP” it was called, or “naked [f?]phanny”--and that was the 606th Air Commando Squadron, which later became a wing. And those were the main people that hit the Trail, did the full air controlling for the Trail. [Coughs]
- And, uh, from there I went back over on temporary duty to the Water Pump Operation and went back up to Laos, and this time they gave me an airplane and said, “Rain death on these bad guys.”
- James: What do you mean, “gave you an airplane”?
- Jack: Then I had to, uh--we used Continental Air Service primarily, which was one of—okay, I’ve mentioned Bird & Son[?] before? They changed their name in ’65. They had a problem with the Lao government. So they

changed their name to Continental Air Service, and, uh, they were the primary supplier of my forward air control airplane, which was a Pilatus Porter, a Swiss turbo, tail-dragger[?].

James: This was a--

Jack: I got a picture of one.

James: That's all right.

Jack: [Laughs] This was a fantastic airplane because it was slow, and you could take off—hundred feet.

James: This was a transport-type airplane?

Jack: Single-engine, uh, it would hold about six people.

James: Oh, I see, like a big Beechcraft. [unintelligible]

Jack: Well, it, it's a single-engine turbo—

James: Okay.

Jack: --which means you can land it in about thirty feet on grass, and that's the kind of airplane that we needed because we had to land in all these places up north and—

James: There were not airfields at all?

Jack: Well, they were, they were--by a stretch of imagination they were airfields, but, uh-- Then we had a, we had an operation and, uh, [coughs]—. Usually, the targets were designated by the CIA, uh, because it, uh, they pretty much ran the war in Laos.

James: What, again, you were bringing in people or supplies or both?

Jack: Bombing.

James: Oh, you were bombing.

Jack: Brought in bombs.

James: You brought them in, or you did the bombing?

Jack: We would meet the aircraft. Okay, if there were strike air—okay, you had my airplane, Butterfly 44, that was my call sign. Okay, above me I've got

an airborne command post, which was a C47 called “Dogpatch.” He was my link to the rest of the world.

So if I wanted, if I had a target that I wanted to bomb, I would call him if this were an immediate operation. I would call him and I’d say, “I need some resources immediately.” Then he would scour the area and find airplanes to send over to me, and then I would make contact with the strike aircraft.

James: Which were what?

Jack: Could have been F105s, 104s, uh, A1 Sky Raiders, T28s. Uh, then because we had no marking capability--I’m flying in a civilian airplane, forbidden to have any weapons—so we had no marking capability. We didn’t have rockets to shoot. [Coughs] So I would have to make sure that the strike aircraft had a visual on *me*, so they could see me. Then I would *explain* to them where the target is, and then they would strike it. So, that’s, that’s the—

James: How long does that operation [laughs] take? This is a four-hour deal, or—

Jack: No, no. We had, we had many times when we would—a lot of the airplanes that we got would have been F105s and 104s that were coming from North Vietnam, and the targets up there had been ‘weathered in.’ Hai Phong and Hanoi had bad weather. Then these airplanes still have their complement of weapons, and they don’t want to take them home.

James: Huh.

Jack: So, we would use them, and by the time we got these airplanes, they would have a maximum of twenty minutes—

James: Yeah, I was gonna say, uh, fuel.

Jack: --of fuel time left. Yep. So, uh, we would have to get those strikes in just as fast as we possibly could.

James: Sure. All right, and you were there in ’67?.

Jack: Sixty-six.

James: To ’67?

Jack: No, end of ’66. I left there in December of ’66. But I left Thailand, no, I left Thailand in late ’66 too. [Coughs] Spent Christmas in Bangkok and New Year’s in Tokyo. [Coughs]

James: In '68 now?

Jack: No. In, while I was still at, uh, in Laos, I wanted to mention this Momyer thing. But before I get into that--to show you these, these, how effective the prop airplanes were as opposed to jets--frequently, especially the F104s which were not designed as close air support, they were air-to-air[?] airplanes, uh, it was very difficult for them to hit a target with a bomb. They were very good with their guns. They had a Gatling 20, 20mikemike[mm?].

But, one morning bright and early we got the word that two villages just east of us had been overrun--place called Tathom and Tavien. So we got in the Porter and drove over there. Couldn't see anything, nothing moving, nothing in the village, not even a dog.

And the village was set up so that on one side was a steep mountain, then there was a grass landing strip and then the village and then a river. And we set up for a landing. We figured that they were in the jungle on the hillside. So we set up for a landing hoping to draw fire, you know, it's called, what we call 'trolling.' So we went in looking for them to shoot, and then we could have something for us to shoot at. And nothing happened; they knew better than to fire.

And about that time Bang Pow's people, his Hmong people, started moving in from the west, and they routed these guys and ran them across the river. And, as it turned out later, it was a battalion of them, and they started moving up a valley, and I got them herded into that valley and brought T28s in. And I had contacted the Water Pump, who was doing the armament--arming the T28s--and told him, "Just keep turning them around and sending them back just as fast as you can reload them."

And we had to--this was Thanksgiving Day 1966. And they were sending me 500-pound, general-purpose bombs in white phosphorus [hundred pounders?]. After about the first four or five—with white phosphorus, of course, you can't see the target anymore [coughs], because of the smoke from those things. So I cut them off and told them to send everything 260-pound frag bombs, fragmentation.

So that we could work with, and we got done with those guys. When the good guys moved through, we had a body count over 300, where we got them bottled in that valley. We'd have never been able to do that with jet airplanes.

James: Huh.

Jack: So, that, that little T28 was a fantastic airplane. Now, the forward air controllers working out of Long Cheng, at that time there were two of us. I was a four-striper, the other guy was a three-striper. Momyer, General Momyer, Commander of 7th Air Force, he's the all-jet Air Force. He doesn't want anything in his Air Force but jets, and he was really hard on the unconventional people at NKP and working out of Udorn. [Coughs]

But one day he and [Harry C.] Heinie Aderholt, who was the father of the counterinsurgency operations in Laos--he was a full colonel at that time; he eventually made brigadier general—he's the one that sent us up there. He was our guardian angel, if you will. He and Momyer were having a lunch at Udorn, and Momyer asked

[TAPE CLICKS & STOPS]

--eventually made brigadier general—he's the one that sent us up there; he was our guardian angel, if you will. He and Momyer were having a lunch at Udorn, and Momyer asked him, "Who's packing those airplanes?" And [laughs] Heinie told him, and he went 'spazz,' and that ended the enlisted scum packing airplanes.

James: What the hell did he want?

Jack: Well, because you're not a qualified pilot, commissioned officer, you're not capable of doing that kind of work.

James: That's nonsense.

Jack: Of course it's nonsense. Their big argument—I'd heard this from other, other, uh, fighter wings—is that, you put an enlisted guy in there directing these air strikes, he doesn't know the capabilities of the jet fighter. Well, why the hell *should* he? I have yet to have a jet fighter come back to me after I give him a target and tell him, "My airplane isn't capable of that."

James: Yeah.

Jack: If the pilot of that airplane doesn't know his capabilities--and there's absolutely no reason why *I* should. I know he can hit a target, and—

James: But that doesn't count at all, illogically.

Jack: No it doesn't. But that, that was Momyer: M-o-m-y-e-r.

James: I know [unintelligible].

Jack: [Laughs] Yeah, he deserves the credit. Okay, where were we? Left there—

James: Tell me about Japan now.

Jack: Yeah, went to Japan, ended up with the Sixth Direct Air Support Flight at Misawa Shi, Northern Honshu.

James: You went back there.

Jack: Back to Japan.

James: In Honshu?

Jack: Yep. Honshu's the island Tokyo's on.

James: Yeah, I know where it is. I'm just trying to think where that is. How far—

Jack: Misawa is up northeast.

James: --from Nikko, yeah, okay.

Jack: It was a, it was a big Japanese Air Base during WWII. And, uh—

James: What did you do there?

Jack: Direct air support, uh, ground forward air controllers, had Jeeps full of radios. I was, uh, in charge of, I was training NCO for the group.

James: Oh.

Jack: And also I was in charge of—

James: An insurgents' group or—

Jack: This was conventional.

James: Oh, okay.

Jack: Yeah, uh—

James: You didn't get back to Florida in that group then. You sorta left them?

Jack: Yep.

James: That was enough?

Jack: Well, no. That was what my assignment took me.

- James: Oh, I see.
- Jack: There were so few people that were jump-qualified to fill a lot of slots. So, you didn't always--the direct air support people and combat control, just about anybody that had any period of time--was in both of those groups, because you'd flipflop back and forth just, uh, you know, so somebody could fill the slots.
- James: Sure.
- Jack: [Coughs] So I ended up there and, uh, I was in charge of the jumpers and the jump training. I rewrote the PACAF [Pacific Air Forces] Regulation for jump training for tactical air control people. Uh, then in, uh, early '68 we got to do the [USS] Pueblo thing in Korea.
- James: "Pueblo Thing" means what?
- Jack: When they took the boat, and we were, I was assigned to ROK [Republic of Korea] Army up on the DMZ, north of Chun Chan [Chuncheong?].
- James: How the hell did you get up there when you're [unintelligible] subject—different assignment that you'd been doing? What were you offering the service at that moment? What did you do there?
- Jack: I was a ground forward air controller. We were assigned to the ROK Army--
- James: Okay.
- Jack: --to supply them with Air. To give them air support in case a balloon went up, which of course it didn't. Uh, and we were, uh—
- James: You were charged with looking after what?
- Jack: Whatever those ROK army units needed.
- James: Okay. Well, then this—what did this have to do with Pueblo?
- Jack: Because the Pueblo, when the Pueblo was taken there was a tremendous buildup on the peninsula of Korea.
- James: Oh, yeah.
- Jack: Just, uh, military—U.S. military stuff just *poured* in there, along with people.

- James: Right.
- Jack: And we were part of that buildup.
- James: Oh, okay. All right, now I understand.
- Jack: But, uh, the ROK Army needed, the U.S. Government figured the ROK Army needed, some moral support in that they could send people up there, then we could draw airplanes up close to the DMZ and show them to the ROKs and say, "We're here, and we got airplanes to support you with."
[Coughs]
- James: Well, that wasn't particularly fun duty for you.
- Jack: It wasn't, it was--I'd been there before, you know, I expected, I knew what to expect for the winter and, uh--
- James: [unintelligible]
- Jack: --first time up there I lived in a tent, so this was actually better, uh, because we had, we stayed at KMAG Center, Army KMAG outfit: Korean Military Advisory Group. Uh, so at least we had a house to live in--
- James: Sure.
- Jack: --uh, which was better than the last time. But while we were out driving around the DMZ, of course, colder than hell. But then the spring came, and it developed into a fine operation.
- James: You stayed there for, what, six months?
- Jack: Yeah, we were between five and six months, yeah.
- James: Then it says you went to Hawaii.
- Jack: Yeah, we're back to Japan and closed that out and then went to Hawaii. And, uh, I was the jump coordinator for the Hawaiian Islands and dropped the jump-qualified people. Borrowed fields from Dole and Delmonte and, uh, spent a year there to finish out my assignment.
- James: Now, how many years had this been now, say?
- Jack: 'Bout sixteen.
- James: Sixteen. You were up to sixteen years in the Air Force?

Jack: Yeah, about that.

James: Yeah, okay.

Jack: Then—

James: Then?

Jack: Went back into combat control when I came back at England Air Force Base, Louisiana. I stayed there about a year, terminated my jump status, and went to Recruiting in Green Bay.

James: That was a [laughs]—

Jack: [Laughs]

James: --a big drop [laughs].

Jack: [Laughs] Well—

James: I mean, you talk about boring, that was [unintelligible] boring.

Jack: [Laughs]

James: [Laughs]

Jack: [Laughs] I think I was ready to relax a little bit.

James: I would think so.

Jack: And I had anticipated getting out at twenty, and I wanted to find out what the civilian community looked like.

James: Yeah.

Jack: And I thought there was no better avenue in the Air Force than to be a recruiter and talk like civilians and act like civilians.

James: Sure. Did you ask for the duty in Green Bay, or did that just happen to be open?

Jack: Well, that was funny. Uh, I told them I wanted Wisconsin, and so they gave me an assignment to Madison. Well, this is in 1971, and you know what's going on at the campus in Madison.

- James: Out there[?], of course I know.
- Jack: So, I'm in, I was in recruiting school at Lackland Air Force Base at the time, and I got a call--[coughs] excuse me—and they said they had a mix-up on, or a problem with, some assignments, and they asked if I would possibly consider going to Green Bay instead of Madison. Well, it didn't take me long to okay that.
- James: Got you away from those crazy kids.
- Jack: [Laughs] So, I ended up in Green Bay.
- James: And, and, uh, you finished your twenty years in Green Bay? What did you do after the service?
- Jack: Well, tried to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. And, uh, I was, uh, partnership in a private detective agency for a while, and that didn't pan out too well. Then did the next best thing, bought a saloon. [Laughs] That's a step up.
- James: [Laughs] In Green Bay, or--?
- Jack: [Laughs] No, this was up in Marinette.
- James: Marinette?
- Jack: No, outside of Marinette, and, uh, then I, I, uh, decided this wasn't really the way I wanted to go. I was still thinking in the back of my mind the reason I joined the military to begin with was to get the G.I. Bill so I could be a history teacher. And so I just chucked it and went to school on the G.I. Bill. And I took first two years at Marinette and second two—
- James: [Is] this UW-Marinette?
- Jack: Yeah. And the second two at Stevens Point.
- James: In what?
- Jack: Well I, I—
- James: History, or--?
- Jack: That's one of them. I had four majors and one minor. Well, I had forty-eight months to kill. So, uh, I took—
- James: Forty-eight months to kill?

Jack: That's what I had G.I. Bill, forty-eight months for G.I. Bill.

James: Got it.

Jack: And I picked Stevens Point because I wanted an anthro major, and they were the only one other than Madison that had it. And I did not want Madison because at my point in life I was not going to spend my time talking to a TA. I want to talk to a professor, and, uh, so that's why I went to Stevens Point. And I ended up with Education, Broad-field[?] Social Studies, History, and Anthropology and a minor in Asian Studies.

James: Okay now, armed with all of this, what did you do with it?

Jack: Came here to Fort Atkinson, did my student teaching waiting for an opening.

James: Where, at the high school, high school level?

Jack: Yeah, well, uh, seven through twelve.

Uh, I had been visiting Fort since about '72. I had a sister living here, and uh, we'd come down here and visited, and liked the area, and met some really nice people, and, uh, I thought that this would be a nice place to settle. So I moved down here, did the student teaching and, uh, looking for an opening. And of course none existed at the time.

So I started subbing, and didn't have any problem, all the work I wanted. And it wasn't very long that they, uh, I had a—trying to think, it was a couple of months, I think was all it was, with, uh, Special Ed, LD and ED. And when they saw what happened when I went in there, then they started hiring me at the beginning of the year *for* the year. So they didn't have to have a contract, and they could save all that money.

And so I did that for three years, taught ED and LD, and then the opening happened in my field. The government teacher retired, and I figured, having been here six years, I should have a pretty good shot at it, until the principal looked me right in the eye and said, "Forget it. You're too old."

James: Good grief.

Jack: In exactly those words. That's when I walked out of the building and—

James: I'll be darned.

Jack: That took care of the teaching business. And if I had had that, I'd probably still be there.

James: That's a shame.

Jack: It sure as hell is. I was never so disgusted in my life.

James: So they'd replace you with a 13-year-old, or some other goddamned thing?

Jack: I have no idea.

James: I can't believe that.

Jack: Huh [laughs].

James: Good teachers are *really* hard to find. Surprised that [unintelligible].

Jack: Boy! This guy—

James: [unintelligible]

Jack: This guy was a real moron.

James: Still here?

Jack: No. No he did the best thing he ever did for the system. He retired.

James: [unintelligible] Strange. That's strange. So, did you join any veterans' organizations?

Jack: Oh yeah. I'm a member of China Post One, American Legion, and uh, Shanghai Post.

James: [Laughs]

Jack: Yeah. Operating in exile.

James: [Laughs]

Jack: It's a viable post.

James: Is it?

Jack: Been operating in exile since '48. Now has, we're building a clubhouse in, uh, in uh, Plano, Tex--, or Houston, Texas, outside of—

James: This represents all the people who were on the, uh, what?

Jack: Well, the Post was founded in 1920 in Shanghai.

James: Right.

Jack: And the communists ran them out in '48

James: Uh huh.

Jack: And uh, but right now it's populated mainly by old Air Commando, Special Forces, Air America, CIA, uh—

James: All spooks.

Jack: Yeah. It's a spook post.

James: [Laughs]

Jack: [Laughs]

James: Wow, that's cute. [Laughs] Okay, and, uh, let's see, you used up your GI Bill and you sort of—

Jack: Yep.

James: --well, you're in a comfortable situation here.

Jack: Yep. I, uh, got real interested in certain areas of history, and that sort of thing, and I pursue that for my own edification. Yeah, I enjoy it immensely.

James: You have a history club around here?

Jack: Not that I know of.

James: They have one in Madison. You should —if you're interested in history, general history, history of the military [unintelligible] Civil War were all taken—

Jack: Oh.

James: --years ago. Yeah, very popular. And that's good. So what do you read now?

- Jack: Well, I do more than one at a time. I've been getting into Gordon [William] Prange here, with his concept of Pearl Harbor, and uh—
- James: Well, he wrote the best book on it.
- Jack: Yeah. Well, I'm not too sure. I'm just getting well into it now. At the same time I'm reading his other one on--
- James: Tokyo?
- Jack: --*Target Tokyo*.
- James: He's a good writer.
- Jack: But I just picked up a two-volume thing in an antique shop on Japanese history. It was the first, the first edition was 1876, and the last one was 1905, and that's written from a very interesting perspective.
- James: Yeah, and before the war [unintelligible].
- Jack: Well, this was during the shogun period.
- James: Oh, is it?
- Jack: Yeah.
- James: All right. I can't think of any—anything else that you've got to tell me?
- Jack: Nope.
- James: Appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]