00;00;00;00 - 00;00;27;11

My name is Luke Aldridge. I'm interviewing Vietnam veteran Bob Nicholson, who served in the Air Force from 1963 to 1993 and was in Vietnam in 1967. Mr. Nicholson, this interview will have four sections Your Life before service, Basic Training, your time in Vietnam and your Life After Service. So let's get started with your background. Okay. Where did you grow up and what was your area known for?

00;00;27;13 - 00;00;54;28

Okay. I grew up in Staten Island, New York, and it's the, one of the five boroughs to New York where the island out there. And we commute to Manhattan. And the real world there by ferry boat was only a nickel. And, I just had a regular childhood, you know, public school and, Curtis High School there.

00;00;55;08 - 00;01;26;04

The thing that I remember, about it, my teachers were members of the Greatest Generation. The book came out later, but, they had just completed World War two. I started grammar school, and like, 1948, 47, 48, those were my teachers all the way through, high school and on into college at the City College of New York, the Berg School of Business in Manhattan.

00;01;26;06 - 00;01;54;21

And I commuted back and forth on, on the bus to the ferry terminal. Ferry terminal to Manhattan, subway to school. The campus was, a nondescript brick building on the corner of Gramercy Park and 14th Street, actually a very nice part of Manhattan in about a 6 or 7 story building. And my teachers in the business school came right out of the, professional community in Manhattan.

00;01;54;23 - 00;02;25;06

I got a great education. And, public accounting worked after school. Actually got a job with the public accounting firm, but, we knew the draft was was coming, and, I thought maybe I would take charge of my destiny since I expected to be drafted. The Vietnam War had started. This was about 1963. Was coming on.

00;02;25;09 - 00;02;52;25

I was scheduled to graduate in January, and I went up, down to the recruiter in Manhattan and signed up for the Air Force. Okay. I was supposed to go get tested for pilot training qualifications. How much had, talented. And they think I had enough talent or what? Typical snafu. I went up to an air base just north of the city, and for some

reason, that was closed.

00;02;52;28 - 00;03;11;09

I could. So, if I could show up here for one second here, well, we'll certainly get to your your basic training in just a second. If we get back up, could you tell me a little bit about your family growing up before during your high school years and your your time in school? Oh. Our family.

00;03;11;27 - 00;03;37;06

Typical family of four. We lived in a, what you would call an apartment was actually an eight, eight plex. Mom did not work. I was the older of two brothers having a younger brother. Now past, two and a half years younger than me. Just let's say both of the kids, you know, I went to school, I rode my bike, I played baseball.

00;03;38;08 - 00;04;08;28

Got hooked at golf. There was a nearby, a public, facility with, tennis courts. And the golf course was right adjacent to that. And played ball, rode my bike, went to went to school. And just that's the regular. That was it. You know, so you mentioned, World War two and the Greatest Generation. Do you have any memories of your father or other men around you telling war stories from World War Two?

00;04;09;00 - 00;04;39;19

No, not war stories. I do remember, I might have been 7 or 8 years old by then. Probably 49. 50. My dad took me to, what would probably be, Memorial Day, you know, big parade. Major street in Staten Island, which came up from the waterfront, was named Victory Boulevard. And we went down.

00;04;39;19 - 00;05;13;27

And I still remember the, formations of soldiers marching with their rifles. I never forgot that. My dad was real patriot. He came over to the country as a little boy, actually, in 1919. Immigrants from Germany, from, Greece through Ellis Island and or family Greek name was magically changed to a British name.

00;05;14;14 - 00;05;48;18

My grandfather's name was Nicholas, probably Ennis. And we became Nicholas. Nicholson was his new name. And that's how the name started. My father's cousin Arthur was in the United States Navy. I came to find, his name was Arthur. Was known to me as Uncle Arthur. And, Arthur flew the dauntless, torpedo fighter off the carriers in World

War two.

00;05;49;02 - 00;06;20;29

That airplane had two people in it, a gunner that sat at the back backwards. So anyone who's seen the victory at sea, any of those shows may have seen the Dauntless fighter, but, he was close with dad, and he was stationed down in Washington and Naval Reserve, and he occasionally, a couple of three times flew one of those little single engine fighter type things up, deployed been Bennett Naval Air Station, which is not there anymore.

00;06;20;29 - 00;06;46;02

It's right next to where JFK John F Kennedy Airport is now. And dad would take me alone. We go out to pick up Uncle Arthur to bring him home for a visit. But I got to sit in that airplane and look around at the airplane. I connected with Uncle Arthur, when we'd visit him and his parents up in New Hampshire and Manchester.

00;06;46;04 - 00;07;13;16

He had the little MG convertible, and he's just a really cool guy. He's a golfer. So dad then would take me down. He took me a few times to, the airport, nearby and in new Jersey. And we would stand that stand on the roof of the terminal, the old fashioned one level terminal.

00;07;13;18 - 00;07;38;02

In those days, it might have been 1952 or 3. And watch the airplanes. Taxi by the constellations and everything. So I, I was I was really attracted to the airplanes and, I think that had a lot to do with me, picking the Air Force. To go ahead and hook up with the Air Force and go fly airplanes.

00;07;38;02 - 00;08;10;10

And that's, that was my first inspiration there. Yeah. Did you have a favorite World War Two movie and growing up a favorite World War Two movie? No, I, I can't say that I did, you know, we didn't go to the movies much. I remember my dad taking me to a movie once, and Wallace Beery pirate kind of thing, but we were we were watching the Victory at Sea programs on television.

00;08;10;15 - 00;08;38;19

Those were all the the films shot by the war correspondent, sent by the military itself said, copied all everything that was going on. The battles in the Pacific, the land battles, the aviation part in that.

And I remember a lot of, film about the European party, the war to the ground, invasions and battles and so on.

00;08;40;03 - 00;09;09;27

The victory at sea with the, with the musical fame that accompanying it really caught my attention. And we we had a sort of a ritual 3:00 every Sunday afternoon, the Dumont TV or whatever, that little black and white TV would go to the channel and we'd watch the latest episode of Victory at Sea. So wasn't much going on with the movies, but television.

00;09;09;27 - 00;09;41;24

Maybe, more about the television. Now, I'd like to move on to the start of your service and basic training. Would you describe yourself as volunteering, being commissioned or drafted? Oh, I volunteered and went to an officer training school, basically. You know, it's it's what the Air Force called it. I think the training here. Well.

00;09;41;26 - 00;10;07;18

Okay, so the Air Force basic training is down at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio and in a, far corner, of the base, they had a special campus, I would call it a campus with a quadrangle, with buildings for the officer trainees and athletic fields and a parade ground where we did a lot of marching and so on.

00;10;07;21 - 00;10;32;00

And, one of the guys I worked at the beach with me were both lifeguards at South Beach. And so that it's not the one in Miami by any means, it's right around the corner where they built from where they built the narrows. There is that old bridge. So we got to see him doing that. We drove down together, the two of us, to San Antonio from New York.

00;10;32;02 - 00;11;01;06

And, we became 90 day wonders. It was an amazing, really interesting experience. You spent six weeks as an underclassman, then you became an over, upperclassman. Classman. I remember the upperclassman coming to my car as I pulled into the parking lot after being in processed and, marching me into the building, into my quarters, carrying my suitcase.

00;11;01;06 - 00;11;31;07

And that's where my military training began. In my squadron was called the hustlers, which was the name of the B-52 bomber. So we were the

hustlers, and we got up every morning. Must have been around 430 or so, and we would sing the squadron song in front of a fire bell in the corridor of the building, and we had to sing it loud enough so that the fire bell resonated.

00;11;31;09 - 00;12;03;06

Okay. And we would march to the, mess hall information with our flashlights and the one flights like we use the Marshall, the airplanes. And the first time I sat down for breakfast, there wasn't one upperclassman at the table with probably 4 or 5 at a big round table and started to eat breakfast and after about, I don't know, maybe seven minutes, the upperclassmen stood up and said, gentlemen, we're finished with breakfast.

00;12;03;09 - 00;12;34;20

Really? And that's where I learned to eat breakfast really fast. But, it was kind of neat, really. It was a mess hall. So you you got in line and you, you told the mess sergeants what you wanted. Eggs and bacon, that whatever it was, so it's really cool. The food was great. So the training, the training, there were academics about the history in the Air Force and so on, some history about it.

00;12;34;22 - 00;13;19;18

And now it's a little bit faint at this time, but, they kind of oriented us to what we were, being formed, educated to do as an officer. Our training officers, were usually around the captain, captain, level of rank. And, we had actual real life drill sergeants. And these people were sharp. They they they were undoubtedly picked for their, appearance in their, ability to relate and direct and speak and so on.

00;13;21;17 - 00;13;50;08

And very cool. The drill sergeants, they have that cadence, you know, and, we did a lot of marching and so on. I guess that build some unity, the physical training, that was something I always, always enjoyed. I'd always taken care of and played athletics. Lifeguard at the beach. So, we had a special game there.

00;13;50;11 - 00;14;19;17

It was called, Flipper Ball. It was a combination of basketball and football. Okay, so it hit each end of the field, and the court was probably about, I'd say 60 yards by about 15 yards. And each hand was a basketball back backboard on a pole. About way. You'd think it would be. But no, it had like a rectangle carved out of it.

00;14;19;17 - 00;14;53;12

And the game was one team against the other, and you got out, you got two points. If you threw the football through the through the opening in the backboard, but you couldn't run forward more than two steps. It's it's a passing coordination team game. And and you could tell pretty fast a few of the guys who had maybe played quarterback in college or high school, they could get they didn't have to get too far down the field to throw that thing, you know, at the backboard and even get it through the opening.

00;14;53;12 - 00;15;16;18

So there was that and then the physical training, you know, running and stuff like that. Right. Enjoyed that. Yeah. So I could I could circle back real quick. Sure. Talk a little bit about, education that you got in the Air Force. So what, if anything, did you know about the country of Vietnam before you arrived at the Air Force?

00;15;16;20 - 00;15;45;23

I didn't really know anything about it. I knew there was, war going on over there. I remember this incident with the ship that one of our ships supposedly being attacked as the reason we had to go in. I'm not sure whether I knew about the domino theory. I know about it now. And I believe it was relevant.

00;15;45;26 - 00;16;15;10

I think it was correct. But I didn't know about the geography of the people or anything. I just knew there was something going on there involving support for an ally on South Vietnam. And that basically an invasion by what we now call terrorists. They were known as the Vietcong. So I didn't know much about it.

00;16;15;12 - 00;16;41;06

Okay, I knew I kind of thought I was going to get involved. Yeah. Okay. Well, I'd like to move on to your time in Vietnam. Sure. Did anything stick out to you about your flight to Vietnam? Well, I remember the trip to Vietnam. I remember the DCA take off at a Travis Air Force base being a pilot at that time.

00;16;41;06 - 00;17;05;00

And you saw I performed at the DCA. It was loaded to the gills right over the water flight, and it flew all the way to the end of the runway and just got airborne. After all the runway was used. But but okay. So we flew maybe to Guam for fuel and then on it to I think it was Clark Airbase.

00;17;06;21 - 00;17;45;26

At Clark Air Base. I caught a contract, contracted a contract flight civilian airplane into, Tanzania. It I think was their airfield in Saigon. Of course, I was uniform, and my only luggage was this big, great big duffel bag with my stuff in it, my uniforms and flight seats and all that stuff. Landed there in Tanzania, and they had a tent camp, the tree and tents, and the, people in charge said, okay, I told them I had my orders, I'm going up to Danang.

00;17;45;28 - 00;18;29;11

And they they said, okay, we'll get back to you. And about the next day they said, okay, we got a ride for you. Go on down to the airfield to base operations. We're going to put you on a C-130 going up to, going up to Danang. Okay. If I go out to the C-130 and it's, there's no seats in the back of the C-130, there's just pallets of cargo with their netting, and I just threw my duffel bag in there and climbed up on, on then on the cargo and sat on the cargo and off we went to, denying nonstop and, had to denying that off the airplane and,

00;18;29;17 - 00;18;59;28

got my bag and I said, okay, where is the, four 80th Tactical Fighter Squadron? And he said, oh, it's right over there. So I basically took my bag and walked into the squadron that time as first lieutenant. I said, okay, I'm your new lieutenant. And then I was home and, guys took me to the barracks and got me settled in back to the squadron.

00;18;59;28 - 00;19;32;26

And that's about how it went. You know, we got into the swing of things pretty fast. Would you describe yourself as being in combat in the rear or something else? Oh, it's definitely in combat. There was a war going on. The, my quarters consisted of, a long, rectangular barracks building, one level with screens on the side.

00;19;32;29 - 00;20;02;22

I mean, there were no walls, basically. And this roof and about the right outside the, the entrance that if anybody seen pictures of them, like, sandbags on them and reinforced and. Yeah, that was, it was a war zone. And, I found out pretty soon Danang was, a target of the, the rocket teams. Kind of like a rocket set.

00;20;03;01 - 00;20;32;25

There were one 22 millimeter and one 40 millimeter, spins, stabilized rockets. They were kind of crude, but they were big. As tall as a man.

And now, when the Viet Cong are the North Sea, it that means army teams that that in through the jungle from the west, all they had to do was get within 8 or 10 miles of us and they could launch these rockets and, you could hear them come in because they were white.

00;20;32;25 - 00;20;56;16

They were spin stabilized and they were just like the world War Two movies or movies. And you can hear the, the, bombs coming at you. And the latter, they got that close to. They were coming to where you were. And I remember the first attack where I was there, not all that long after I arrived.

00;20;56;19 - 00;21;28;19

I was, on the upper bunk. So we had upper and lower bunks. This was not five star resort, you know? And, Dick Hoover, one of my friends, was on the air, and and you could hear him coming in and the sirens go off, and, I basically dove off the top bunk and landed, and, there was a one of the senior pilots in the squadron was nearby, and they said, well, okay, what do we do?

00;21;28;19 - 00;21;58;11

Do we go to the bunker and he says, nope, stay down where you are. And we just waited for the attack to be stopped or whatever until it stopped. And that was my first introduction to, your home being a target. And, there was a lot to follow throughout my nine months there. So the base was a combat air area was not a sanctuary at all.

00;22;00;08 - 00;22;26;07

In June, I remember. So this is, late January, beginning of February. In late June, one night, we had all the, Air Force that were going north, on missions into the Hanoi area were fully loaded with bombs and everything. And they came in with a rocket attack. And it was it was right on target.

00;22;26;09 - 00;22;57;04

It was right in the developments in the area on the flight line where the airplanes were. And, that went on for a while, till they probably ran out of rockets. And we returned fire, knocked them down and, went out the next day. And man, there were huge excavations where some of those airplanes had blown up and you could stand in and say, airplanes flipped up on their back on top of the revetment here.

00;22;57;04 - 00;23;30;15

A lot of damage kept. Some guys got killed, firemen that were out

fighting the fires and, yeah, was a combat zone that was home. Could you describe the type of missions that you went on? Okay, basically, I flew 137 missions, and, the rules were if you completed 100 missions north, that was the end of your tour because of your exposure to, intense any aircraft, fire missiles and so on.

00;23;30;17 - 00;24;15;09

And we flew in-country missions to South Vietnam. So there were 37 of those. I don't have a lot of memories about all of them. I remember a couple of them, distinctly, but they were basically close air support missions for troops in contact with, with the enemy. And all those missions, you basically had a forward air controller, spotting the target for you, the forward aircraft, air controller was, in a small airplane, a Cessna type, one, which was around two as a push prop Cessna type.

00;24;15;12 - 00;24;53;17

And the other one was the of ten Bronto, a twin turbo, but also a small aircraft. And the forward air controller was in radio contact with the friendlies on the ground with our army people on the ground and coordinating and spotting the target for us to hit. And, we would drop, high drag, low altitude bombs on, troop on them foreign troops, strafe 2.75in rockets, sometimes cluster bomb like, unit Seabees.

00;24;53;17 - 00;25;20;01

We call them, variety of ordnance that we carried down South Hill. Engage the enemy accurately, as accurately as possible with the controller in the back. And we get feedback through the fac on the Army appreciation, you know, for whatever you did napalm a couple of times for used napalm. So those were basically close air support missions.

00;25;21;28 - 00;25;48;10

One of them really struck home with me. That was about 25 miles west of Danang, in the jungle area. It was a medic medevac support we got. We were sitting alert. We usually had two Air Force on alert, sitting all cocked and loaded, ready to go for such, that kind of mission. All you had to do was run out and strap in and lock in and start the engines.

00;25;48;10 - 00;26;17;03

They had priority on the runway right away. Boom. Off you go. They give you a direction where to go and who to contact for air control. So this was a medevac mission where the Army had clear the landing zone on top of the hill, and the, VC or the the Army had, you know,

Vietnam Army had surrounded our guys down there, and they were fighting back.

00;26;17;03 - 00;26;41;18

But we were we were, dropping ordnance very close in so close that as we pulled out of the release, we were gone right over the medevac area, and I could see the Huey helicopters down there with, actually, you see the corpsman in there and our Army guys bringing stretchers into the helicopters and everything. So I remember that one.

00;26;41;18 - 00;27;13;26

Never forgotten that one. But, Mostly that's that's the one that stuck with me any more than 37, you know, six moments, 60 years beyond that experience. It's some of it kind of fades away. Just the feel of it remains, you know, the getting ready signaler getting launched on targets, talking to the fact, getting feedback. Yeah. You mentioned a story during the pre-interview about a mission targeting a steel factory.

00;27;13;28 - 00;27;51;14

Could you describe that for me? Yeah, that was up north. A steel factory, We'd hit that. Quite a feat. You know, before you go up on missions, you get a briefing from intelligence and let they know maybe photographs. Recent engagement in the area, defenses, that sort of thing. And, so picture satisfactorily pretty much had not that not that there but we knew it was intensely did defend it.

00;27;54;02 - 00;28;20;24

So anyway, we went up there in a four ship and we, we carefully briefed for that mission, because it was basically one pass and as we say, one pass and. Oh, yes, because you weren't going to make a second pass on that target. So we had brief we were going to dive bomb information. We were going to be the Thunderbirds.

00;28;20;26 - 00;28;53;05

Okay. And basically we were going to dive 60 degree dive rolling in at 23,000, 60 degree dive, probably around 450 knots. Nuts. So you're not in that dive long with the pull out of 10,000ft. And, the guys flying two, three and four, I was in number 3 or 4. I'm trying to think number three, would release bombs on lead.

00;28;53;07 - 00;29;33;05

Lead was the only guy tracking the target. We were tight formation on him, very tight. So we went up the east side. It, over the Gulf came

in from the east, 23,000ft. Turn left, turn right, turn left. Saw the target rolled in from 23,000ft. And, yeah, they had the. Any aircraft on the way in? We had they were trying to track us with the 85 millimeter, which has radar assistance on, on targeting, and we had to move it around a little bit.

00;29;33;05 - 00;30;05;24

They couldn't keep up with our movement. Once we went into the dive, my job basically was to call, altitude and airspeed, to the guy in the front cockpit, the aircraft commander, Dick Farrell. And, the aircraft fire was all around with the flak, and you could see, your peripheral vision is. It's amazing. Harry.

00;30;05;27 - 00;30;36;16

How sharp you get. You know, the simulated, time does really slow down. Everything is is observed and taken in. You can see the shells going by. You can see him spinning the heat on him. Right? I mean, it was all around us. But anyway, it was a fantastic maneuver. Perfect formation bombs released. We had briefed a and elements split, meaning, leading number two would go one way.

00;30;36;22 - 00;31;03;05

And so we broke at 10,000ft with a hard hygiene pull off to the right. The other element, the two airplanes went the other way, and it was a column of flak in France. I mean, it was like the 4th of July, you know, out there. But so they were tracking it. They were barrage ING ahead of us. But we we broke right, left hard and we never took a hit.

00;31;03;07 - 00;31;18;16

It was like a, like a miracle. And, we got the back out over the Gulf and we went back to today, but we came back in brief, you know,

00;31;18;18 - 00;31;47;26

You know, you wonder why we got put in that target again. The heck was that all about? I learned later that, Mr. Johnson, Mr. McNamara. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, had decided he would he would announce our targets in the North Vietnamese. These kinds of daylight, hard bombing targets to North Vietnamese. So the civilians would be heard.

00;31;47;28 - 00;32;26;16

Well, we're not bombing civilian areas. We're bombing railroad yards and logistical infrastructure. Yeah, well, anyway, I wonder about that. There was one other exciting mission that while there were a number of them, a lot of night missions looking for trucks, we got to

be pretty good at that. With the assistance of the army, we had a special airplane with sensors that could see the heat trails of the trucks, and they were running in the dark and little narrow roads in the jungle.

00;32;26;18 - 00;32;51;29

But, if you want to hear one more word story I've got to have. Okay. It's, I related to this victory and saving lives. We were going to fly so the four can fly a variety of missions, you know, could do air to air in the ground. Air defense. It was a flying tank. It was amazing.

00;32;51;29 - 00;33;18;22

Airplane! We were flying MiG cap combat air patrol on an f 105 strike on the outskirts of Hanoi and one of their railroad yards or something. And the orchestration of that thing, was it was amazing how the how the whole operation was set up. So we were going to meet the f 105 on the air refueling tracks and layers.

00;33;18;25 - 00;33;49;04

So an area fueling track, it's a point in space where we're going to find where we can find through inertial left coordinates or tactical air navigation system, radials and DMA coordinates where there's a KC 175 tanker waiting for us. And when we went out there. So we have two flights of four a force A and a fly above the F 100 fives and C one of five go towards the target.

00;33;49;11 - 00;34;13;10

And again we're up above 20,000ft. 2023. So we go out and hit the tankers that overlay us, and you can see the other tankers and you can see the F-100 fires. It kind of reminded me of the Assembly of the naval fleets in the victory at sea thing. I mean, it was absolutely amazing. It was so perfectly orchestrated.

00;34;13;12 - 00;34;37;10

We individually before airplanes would refuel off the tanker to top up our fuel tanks, and then we would read we were joined with the F-100 fighters with one flight Air Force at the lead above the one on fives and the other four at the tail end of the formation. They were at 2 or 3 flights of four of the air 400 fives.

00;34;37;10 - 00;35;09;23

And so I remember I couldn't what once you were above them like that, you can't really see much of them. So the purpose of being up there was, the two fold. One was to suppress the same surface air, missile

acquisition radars. All right. They had, surface to air missiles. If you didn't see them coming off at launch, you didn't have much chance to avoid them because they got supersonic pretty fast.

00;35;11;01 - 00;35;35;20

But we had jamming pods on our Air force, and we flew 750ft wingtip separation, and we were spread out, and we were jamming straight down. So, any time we were jamming like that, they couldn't really. Yeah, the radars couldn't really paint us. We were jamming them. And the other thing we had on board, of course, were missiles.

00;35;35;20 - 00;36;12;08

In case the man had been MiGs came up. We also had and this was probably a key thing, old fashioned World War Two kind of Korean War stuff. We had chaff, which is aluminum strips of foil that are cut to the exact wavelength that would, be detected by this surface to air missile radar systems. And they were packaged in a little rectangular package that we simply put it up in the screed brake wells of the underside of the airplane.

00;36;12;08 - 00;36;44;05

So speed breaker, just basically panels that you can open with a flick of a switch on a stick to slow the airplane down. And they set up in a little, well, on an airplane. So when we go to the target, we're right over the 105 where, in airplane number four with the picture again, and our job on the first turn over the target 90 degree turn, while the thuds are rolling in and getting into their dive, we put out our chaff.

00;36;44;08 - 00;37;05;24

Okay, we've got all four and echelon. The Sams can see us because the jamming pods are pointed horizontally. Okay, we roll out of the 90 degree first 90 degree turn. So I look down, I can see the phones going in. I can see them 2,000 pounds piled, bombs going off. I'd never seen them years before. They're like mini nukes.

00;37;05;24 - 00;37;30;15

They're so powerful. We roll out, I check six. The Sam went off on the chaff. It looks like the I don't know Saturn back there. You know, big fireball, shrapnel ring, smoke ring, yellow thing. Okay, so we finish the mission. I don't say I didn't say anything to anybody about that. We were busy. Busy. And now we egress basically with the sides.

00;37;30;15 - 00;37;56;17

Everybody goes down on the deck, back to Leo's, get gas, go home. They go home to Thailand, right wherever we go back to day. So in the debrief with Intel we say, okay, mission went. You know, as planned. Everything good a lot of response a lot of an aircraft. Yes. So, anybody got anything to say? I said, I got one thing for you.

00;37;56;17 - 00;38;29;20

The chaff works. What do you mean? Well, we were before we put out the chaff. We rolled out of that turn, I look back, the missile went off on the chaff. So that was that was memorable. Otherwise most of the missions up up north were looking for trucks. How would you describe the people you served with in terms of economic background, race or religion, my fellow pilots.

00;38;31;27 - 00;38;55;04

Was upstanding Americans, you know, you know, I was a junior guy right out a pilot training. So as the pilot in the back. Yeah, I got a stick in it. And, I'm like the assistant fighter pilot in his plane. I can do things if he pilot up front. Gets a little bit disoriented or something, I can take the airplane.

00;38;55;04 - 00;39;21;08

I had a complete instrument panel, radar info, file, everything. I was so impressed. You know, it was a privilege, to be in their company. I'll put it that way. My aircraft command that I mostly flew with was already an instructor in airplane and a lot of experience. A lot of these guys had trained for years and tactics.

00;39;21;08 - 00;39;53;08

Been in Europe with the FAA, what have you, they were they were great pilots, very disciplined. It was serious, serious business. And, they said example for me. You know, I was proud to just be accepted for what I was in, in the squadron. And they really they really motivated me. And, they're great comrades.

00;39;53;10 - 00;40;19;27

That's what they were. This, patch here and then fighter patch. It was a story behind the gun fighter patch. 366, TAC Fighter Wing. We had three, three squadrons there, but besides, mine was the four ATF, and there was, 389, 390 if they came, I can't really remember. But, you know, the the, scientists, I thought we didn't need the gun on the airplane anymore.

00;40;20;03 - 00;40;43;01

So the airfoil was missile only. We had the radar. Missile? I had the right the radar, long range. You could shoot you random enemy. You could lock onto him and shoot him when he was 20, 30, 40 miles away from you with that particular missile. And you also had a closer range missile, a, a heat seeking missile.

00;40;43;03 - 00;41;10;12

Well, the MiGs figured out that they could get turned really close in, in front end the F4, and we had nothing to shoot him with because they had to be a certain distance away for even the heat missile to lock on and track. So, the wing commander brought in, deputy for ops boots, I'll say, who had four meetings in in Korea and we take it away.

00;41;10;14 - 00;41;58;09

Had to configure you, and hang the Gatling gun on the center line, pylon for the for the airplane. And the week I was over in the Philippines with Dick doing a test start up, and Ford had been, he'd gone over the fire control system in the stand. He shoot dummy missile at it, told target. And anyway, the guys went up north with the with a gun on one of these combat air patrols and shot down for me on that mission that did their regular thing pulling front out and they just they didn't heavily computing gunsight and the Air Force C model, which these were, they just pulled the nose of the airplane

00;41;58;09 - 00;42;23;10

out of the MiG in front of the MiG in the turn, holds them with a Gatling gun which shot 6000 rounds in a minute. He could only do an 8 to 10 second burst because it got too hot. You know, you can just in a they shot down for me. So there was a major in the squadron, Chuck Holton, who was a an accomplished artist, cartoonist.

00;42;23;12 - 00;42;58;05

Every day after towards the end of the daylight mission, see, he draw a cartoon of the event of the day. Right. And, they asked him to design a patch. And that's this patch. It shows the phantom caricature holding the Gatling gun. And the wing became the gun fighters. And we had it a truck, and we were getting quite a few meetings with, staff I saw in that truck that took us back and forth into the the flight line to take us back a little transportation truck.

00;42;58;07 - 00;43;25;07

We were in the make believe we were the van file. Of course, the MiGs figured that out, and then they stayed away for quite a while. But we he never saw him again. Actually, they I don't know, they changed their tactics. That's what they did. Well, they they changed their

tactics. How did living in Vietnam and meeting Vietnamese people affect you?

00;43;25;09 - 00;43;55;25

You know, they were hard, hard working people. I would see them out and in the rice fields and stuff, working on the base, taking care of, housing chores. You know, they would clean, clean the barracks and stuff. There was a Vietnamese Air Force squadron on the base. They flew the A-1 Sky Raiders. Our last prop fighter that America had designed.

00;43;55;25 - 00;44;24;17

We had Americans flying that fighters to as, cover for rescue missions and going in with helicopters to pull guys out because they could loiter in the area. So, they were they were flying those A1 they're a handful big radial engine and Vietnamese, generally smaller stature like me. You know, they fly in this airplane, but we we would mix with them sometimes we'd play, volleyball with them.

00;44;24;19 - 00;44;46;00

Big sport over there. Not for us. They would cream us, you know, we'd play Valparaiso. Good, and we'd share sodas with them and just be be with them a little bit. I liked them all. I think you'd seen walking around the base. A lot of Vietnamese, working in a club, preparing meals and whatever. But I liked them.

00;44;46;00 - 00;45;10;02

And to this day. Now look at look, you know, if you buy something made in Vietnam, it's well made. I want to tell you, I've got clothes. And we bought a leather chair for my wife's desk. Desk chairs. Beautiful. This. They just want to be like most peaceful, peaceful people. I think they just want to be left alone.

00;45;10;02 - 00;45;40;13

It's. It's always the tyrants. And then to get us all in trouble, I. I these people. Yeah. Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam. No. Surprises when we were on nights, flying night. We might fly nights for a month or six weeks before we go back. Two days. We'd go down to China Beach, you know. Okay.

00;45;40;16 - 00;45;50;05

Place got kind of famous. A beautiful beach goes down, hangs right on the harbor, right on the on the coast. And,

00;45;50;07 - 00;46;13;18

We go through town on the back of a six by truck to, to the beach. It was kind of a, department recreational area. We had Marines on the other side in the base. Marine eight sixes in their it's. And the Marines had come in from the field for a little rest and and refreshment, you know, and they'd come down the beach, too.

00;46;13;21 - 00;46;40;17

And, I go over the other side of the beach base where they had a nice base exchange in a cafeteria, and I'd see the Marines coming in from the field, the young kids, you know, I was an old kid. I was 25, you know, with these young guys, you know, they may be 19, 20, 23, but you coming into the field, you know, and color colors bleached and your boots and walking around in the swamps and everything.

00;46;42;11 - 00;47;13;05

I wouldn't call it culture shock. It's just, an exposure to a life experience, that awakens you to a lot. It, it makes you appreciate your country a lot. They'll tell you that, and the, the basics on which we were, you know, the the miracle of the 4 or 5 things that invented our country and the Constitution and.

00;47;13;07 - 00;47;43;04

The freedom that we have and so on. So I guess that's, an awareness more than just a tremendous learning experience at a young age. Yeah. You know, you get serious about life and, You know, I, I met with a fellow this morning, just a friend who's a pastor, actually, he retired a pastor. And you look at your experiences and a couple that I had, and you went there.

00;47;43;04 - 00;48;15;10

You fly so many missions and really never take a hit despite everything you're subjected to. And he went away. How did this happen? That I went through this and I, I wasn't touched, you know, I wasn't harmed. So. Okay. Do you remember seeing Agent Orange being sprayed? I do, one of the missions we flew occasionally out of Danang was to, fly cover for the ranch hand.

00;48;15;10 - 00;48;44;27

See 123. I guess they were five to see. 123. He's had a contingent base that today they actually went into the hangar and walked on to the ramp that day, used to discharge the tanks and looked around the airplane and never took a flight with them. Yeah. Asher Valley and, we'd like cap over those guys. You'd have to weave around and try to

stay behind him.

00;48;44;27 - 00;49;14;26

No of them. And rolling on, stuff that was being shot from the ground at him and, could see them dispersing their stuff on the foliage and, take clear the area. So I did see that. Were you concerned at the time about it, George? About what? About Agent Orange? No. We knew he didn't want to get it on.

00;49;14;27 - 00;49;45;23

You know, he didn't want to get involved with it. I think it actually eventually got my brother, who was an infantry man, later in life. So the late night was a great thing, but, you much the kind of whiff of it somewhere it turned out to be very dangerous. Powerful. That defoliant. Yeah, but they didn't. They never really.

00;49;45;25 - 00;50;13;02

Told us, you know, made a point about how dangerous they might be to us and or wasn't discussed. Yeah. What were some of the ways you coped with the war? Coped with it. Okay. I think going going to the beach basically during the day, swimming in the ocean. At one time that I was there, Jonathan Winters showed up.

00;50;13;02 - 00;50;38;22

You know, he's blessed. So I'm marine, I'm at the beach with the guys and you know, all the guys, the marine guys there was just swimming. Hey, Jonathan Winters is here. So he come off the beach and there's Jonathan Winters in there. They had some picnic tables and he just came over to say hello to us, shake some hands and started going through my routine.

00;50;38;22 - 00;51;07;08

But I think that that was part of it, just being with your comrades, going to the club and having dinner with them or to the mess hall. We had a couple of our in our trips you could take. We had Gunfighter Airlines, which was a C-47, camouflaged C-47. We went down to twice. That was a nice break.

00;51;11;06 - 00;51;38;27

I don't know. I guess, The rockets coming in warning the FAA that the Navy flew had a lemon flow thing when you put the gear down or the flaps down I'm not sure what it was. Probably the flaps on the FAA a little slow. Some of the jet air air over the wings and it wind just like the rockets do.

00;51;39;00 - 00;52;04;25

And if you were sleeping, okay, the rockets would wait. You know, the whining would wake me up. Okay? And I had to. I had to learn to differentiate the subtleties between the FAA s whine and the rockets y, which I was able to do. Oh my goodness. But, I coached. I know that I didn't run at that time.

00;52;04;25 - 00;52;35;11

Well why you didn't run around the base. You just, you just worked went to the beach fully missions and okay. What was the most beautiful thing you saw in Vietnam? Yeah, it it is, it is a beautiful, beautiful country that the lushness of it, the coast and so on. One day when we're in the northern part of South Vietnam, I don't know what we were doing down there.

00;52;35;11 - 00;53;07;10

We probably had some fuel to burn, and, Dick took us over the, other way, which was like the, historical sacred city or whatever. And we went in kind of low, not fast, and just took a look at it. There was beautiful. I know later during Tet, there was it big battle there. But yeah, it's beautiful.

00;53;10;03 - 00;53;36;29

In the town of Danang, you can see the French, some of the French design and houses and so on. But it we just went right to the Navy Club. Is where we going? Usually for once or twice for a special occasion. Going away party or whatever, for some of the guys would finish their tour. We weren't looking at beauty.

00;53;37;01 - 00;54;03;25

Who did you write to or receive letters from when you were in Vietnam? Well, I would send tapes mostly with these little tape recorders, and we had a place I would send it to my wife at the time back and forth, and let letters back and forth. Now when every week or ten days to my parents back home.

00;54;03;27 - 00;54;41;20

That's bad. It. I don't remember where they they sent me letters back. I don't know, I guess I got a few I don't really remember. What was your most expensive or frequent purchase at the. I know. Maybe buying tapes for the tape machine. That wasn't much. When I went to Hong Kong. That was really someplace I can, stay in the hotel and hear the prices there.

00;54;41;21 - 00;55;09;07

They were free of any TV or anything. So I bought some gifts for my wife there. I bought a nice watch for myself that was about it. And really spent money. I was nice place to have dinner and, tour around the city. Kowloon and Hong Kong. Beautiful place. That's the end of my service. Questions. I'd like to move on now to your post service life.

00;55;09;09 - 00;55;39;23

Yeah. What relationship in your life was most changed by your service? Well, I suppose I'd have to say, I, my my wife and I ended up divorced due to the absence of whatever, I, you know, that I was changed that much, but I think she wasn't having any of the military life, so there was there is probably it.

00;55;39;26 - 00;56;09;28

Yeah, that was kind of. Yeah, it's sad for a while, but, always busy. Other than that, you know, you busy, you go right to your next assignment and there's a whole, come around ship with a whole group of new people and lots to do. Lots of rewarding things. Busy things to do. Which is some failing.

00;56;10;00 - 00;56;44;15

And, you just go. You just go on. I was kind of isolated a little bit from current events, so I didn't, agonize too much about the war or what? What was going on? Soon after I got back, the Tet offensive and the distortions about, what really happened in the Tet Offensive. I was aware of them, but I was in Del Rio, Texas, down by the border.

00;56;44;15 - 00;57;18;12

And we were training pilots as fast as we could. And, I was flying two, sometimes three sorties a day, sometimes seven days a week. And, I was having a ball flying the day 38 and training these pilots and, you know, for after a while I had a girlfriend. I, statement. Fine. So did you know any antiwar veterans after your service?

00;57;19;13 - 00;57;55;12

No. Not really. Well, in a little town like Del Rio or San Antonio, there's a lot of military presence there. It's really. It's Texas. It's not San Francisco. The interesting thing, any I think of it when I, when I came back, you know, I was in my daily uniform, you know, my tans and I had my flight jacket and I had my, my, helmet bag that I shared you guys with me walking through.

00;57;55;12 - 00;58;20;09

I came in to Travis Air Force Base, and, I can't remember whether it's a bus or whatever. Took me down to seeing it. San Francisco International on it and walking through the airport with my helmet and my helmet bag in full uniform. And it was like I was invisible. No one talked to me. No one said Booth to me.

00;58;20;12 - 00;58;46;08

I thought that was really weird. Yeah, I had my combat badges on my jacket that I said blue, blue to me. Texas is Texas me. And that is a fantastic place. Military presence in Del Rio was, you know, we were a big thing in the town. It's a lovely town, lovely relationship with the folks on the other side of the border.

00;58;46;08 - 00;59;12;29

It's right there. It's on the Rio Grande. They come over to work, they help, they go. Farmers and they go back. And he was great, saying, next assignment, San Antonio. Number of military installations in San Antonio. It's pretty famous for a military that was flying up there for a couple of years. Most places I was, assigned to.

00;59;13;02 - 00;59;20;27

Yeah, the military base was there, and it was pretty military. Yeah.

00;59;21;00 - 00;59;27;18

Who? Since the war have you talked to about Vietnam?

00;59;27;20 - 00;59;47;19

You know, recently, I talked to some of my friends where I live about, you know, they were a little curious. They know. You know, I've got, DFC plate on the front of my truck in,

00;59;47;21 - 01;00;20;09

I tell them a little bit about my experiences. Really interested about that. Interesting that my friend, Travis Vanderpool wrote this 250 page book, and I just I just basically finished it, you know, and at the end of his book, he he did a look back on Vietnam and how misled the American people were by the media, especially about Tet.

01;00;20;09 - 01;00;48;29

What was going on to say? It completely misled, and why we were there and demonizing the people that were carrying out their duties. You

know? And so, Interesting thing. When I came back and, A couple of years later, I went home to visit my folks in Staten Island, and I went into Manhattan in my uniform.

01;00;49;01 - 01;01;33;02

So this would have been about 1970, maybe. So the the war was still going on. I went into Manhattan, you know, Macy's and had a girl with me in. How many people came up to me and shook my hand and how friendly it was. This, this, this was New York, and this was still. The older people, especially, this was still a World War Two generation, you know, who knew, who had a feel for what the military was all about, what could happen even to your own country.

01;01;33;02 - 01;01;59;13

Right. Which is really a situation we're in right now. We're not we can't hide behind the oceans anymore. So, I don't talk about it much other than that. You know, I don't think we need the guys do. It's just when we're amongst ourselves we might reminisce. If you were with people you flew with over there, you might, you know, talk about it a little bit.

01;01;59;13 - 01;02;29;29

But let's talk about your life and yeah. What's going on? Your family, just like regular people. Yeah, I mean, something, it's in the past. Have you been to the wall in DC? Yeah. Been there twice. It makes me cry. Makes me cry.

01;02;30;01 - 01;02;58;09

I was at a concert once. Billy Joel has that song about Vietnam. What? They look up to you saying it ain't never seen me. It's just I cry at the sound that. Hey, hey, helicopters sing the song. You know I love the song. Just there's something in you. It's, that sadness about it. That, is there sleeping in you.

01;02;58;11 - 01;03;25;05

And certain things just bring it out. And the Vietnam War was two of the names here in just, couldn't handle it. Couldn't handle it. So. That's the way it is.

01;03;25;07 - 01;03;55;28

Have you been back to Vietnam? Yeah, I probably will go. I've read a lot about it. I know people go over there on vacation now. They build up golf courses and resorts and anything I say, good for them. You know, the Vietnamese, you know, they fought a war that I don't know

much about in 71 or 2 with the Chinese and beat them on some problems.

01;03;56;01 - 01;04;31;08

Stuff that surprised her. They are real go getters. Hey, hey, here, real quick have disappointed me. Have courage. And the thing I've learned in Southeast Asia. I had a tour in Thailand or my tour in, 70, 75 and 76. They are proud of their cultures. They are. They're not diverse. And I don't care about diversity. They they love their culture.

01;04;31;10 - 01;04;55;01

They want you don't want to get in a fight with any of those people, whether it's the Thais or this South Koreans. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The South Koreans were I if I remember, I were helping us in South Vietnam.

01;04;55;04 - 01;05;27;14

Never came in contact with. Yeah. I've been to Korea later in life when I was in the service and. I'm glad we did what we did in Korea. There would be no South Korean in the world. Being shit wouldn't be as good as it is because they have something that really isn't. Okay, this is my last question. Do you have a favorite book, poem or movie about Vietnam?

01;05;27;17 - 01;06;06;20

Yeah, not really, I guess. I've watched a few. You know, I. I watch them and I, I can relate and I know in their theatrically over the top. But, Now, you know, I've got war movies on my desk and my television, and they've been sitting there. I don't ever watch. And it's. I don't watch them. I can I know what it is.

01;06;06;20 - 01;06;14;21

You know, once you've seen one, every once you've been where I've been, it's.

01;06;14;23 - 01;06;39;25

It's not entertainment. And I think, You know, what's going on in Israel and so on. And, And I think Americans really appreciate what's going on there. There any particular movies that you watch that you didn't like?

01;06;39;28 - 01;07;07;10

Well, I suppose I. I know, I remember Patton, I like the Patton movie

that gosh, I saw that in about 1972. I know, that was great. Thank you. Yeah. But, yeah, I, I might start one. It never I that's why I never watch it. I might just turn it off in the mail on France. Band of brothers who was great at it.

01;07;07;10 - 01;07;11;15

I think you again. I love that.

01;07;11;17 - 01;07;21;01

Yeah. Mr. Nicholson's it's been great interview. Thank you very much. I hope so. Thank you for for coming. Thank you so much for inviting me. Absolutely.