00;00;00;00 - 00;00;26;02

My name is Luke Aldridge. I'm interviewing Vietnam veteran Richard Cho Koski, who served in the Air Force. He was in Vietnam from March 1969 to March 1970. Mr. Cho koski. 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. Where did you grow up and what was your area known for?

00;00;27;09 - 00;00;55;25

Well. My father was from New York. My mother was from northwestern Iowa, and my father's World War Two veteran had a military career. So I was really, scattered all across the world. I really didn't have a home town, I guess, until I arrived in Aiken, South Carolina. Can you tell me more about your family growing up?

00;00;55;28 - 00;01;30;15

Well, we, my dad was pretty much a historian in his own right. He loved, European history and in World War one, World War two history. And, he spoke several languages. And in 1956, my mother, my sister and I traveled across the North Atlantic to meet my father in France, where he was stationed at Tularosa Air Base.

00;01;30;17 - 00;02;12;27

And, it's probably the best education I had. Like I say, he spoke several languages and loved history. And, I was able to travel all over Europe extensively. And, in 1959 was even able to go behind the Iron Curtain there and applied to the State Department and, got approval, to go visit relatives in Poland and the travel through Czechoslovakia and into Poland and, we, touched on Russian territory for a while.

00;02;12;27 - 00;02;39;08

And, it was a great experience for a 12 year old boy to, just see what Eastern Europe was like and what communism was like and how the people lived. So your father was career Air Force. He was career Air Force. And, actually he actually had, discharges from the Army in World War two, from the Navy and from the Air Force.

00;02;39;11 - 00;03;03;16

He just loved the military. So I think at one time he wanted to join the French Foreign Legion. But my mother put stops to that. Did you have any siblings? I have, had one sibling. My sister Kathy, she was two years younger than I am.

00;03;03;18 - 00;03;13;25

You mentioned that your father was in World War two. Do you have any memories of your father or other men around you telling war stories from World War Two?

00;03;13;28 - 00;03;47;06

No. Not really. Dad, really didn't talk about World War Two much. He was a B-17 crew member, and I remember him telling me how amazed he was. He was basically he was stationed originally in, in England and, then they, as a squadron, moved to, Foggia, Italy. And, I remember him telling telling me about flying over the Swiss Alps and how, beautiful.

00;03;47;06 - 00;04;11;17

And he was just in awe of the Swiss Alps and, and, I think they even got down into, do a lot of recon photographing. Even down through, through Africa. So when you heard those stories, did that have a big impact on you as a kid?

00;04;11;19 - 00;04;43;29

Not really as a child, but, as time went on, the more I learned, I had a appreciation for, for the things that, the folks in World War Two actually did and the number of places that, that he, he went to. So. Did you have a favorite World War II movie growing up? No. Not really.

00;04;44;01 - 00;05;09;06

The the the best, World War two movie. I think, in my mind now is Saving Private Ryan. So. And, as as a child, when, when we lived in France, the battlegrounds of World War one and World War two were my playground scissors. 12 year old,

00;05;09;09 - 00;05;37;24

So to kind of circle back to your own experience, where did you go to high school? I graduated from, Pius, the 10th high school in Lincoln, Nebraska. And were you there for all four years of high school? I was there for, we had just gotten back into the United States, and there were stationed at Lincoln Air Force Base, and I entered, Pius 10th High School as a sophomore.

00;05;40;29 - 00;06;15;10

Before Vietnam, where did you go to college and what did you study and. Well, I originally, enrolled at University of Nebraska and after a year, dad had orders. To be stationed in Iowa City, Iowa. He was the

local air force recruiter in town. So I transferred to the University of Iowa and, majored in psychology. And what year was that?

00;06;15;12 - 00;06;53;08

That would have been 1965, and I graduated in 68. Okay. Did you hear anything about the Vietnam War during your time in college? Well, the University of Iowa was kind of a, hotbed of protest. Biggest organization, students for a Democratic Society were, protesting, continually and pretty hot and heavy and believe that, the first person to burn his draft card was a University of Iowa student.

00;06;53;11 - 00;07;09;11

So, yeah. So you were you got to see all of that. I witnessed it every day. And how did you feel about it? As, as the son of a military career man? Well, at.

00;07;09;14 - 00;07;43;10

The. At being in ROTC and growing up in a military family. I guess it was ingrained in to me to be fairly. Patriotic individual. And then just, had to avoid the, the protests and the activity at the time. As much as I could. So you weren't there for the draft car burning. You just heard about it.

00;07;43;12 - 00;07;47;05

Heard about it the next day? Yeah.

00;07;47;05 - 00;07;55;16

Well, I'd like to move on to the start of your service. Would you describe yourself as volunteering, being commissioned or drafted?

00;07;55;16 - 00;08;24;06

Well, I, I was, volunteered to go in and after ROTC graduation day that were for students that were sworn in as commissioned officers by their fathers. Three of the fellow students, their fathers were full colonels, and my father was a master sergeant at the time.

00;08;24;09 - 00;08;51;12

And, they were a little bit. And we we made the newspaper commissioned officers can, can swear people in. And my father was a, became a notary public. So he could, do the swearing, swearing in service at graduation. And it was a pretty proud day for him and for me. So that was a special moment, having your dad swear you in?

00;08;51;14 - 00;09;21;13

Yes. Exceptional. Yeah. Did you expect to go to Vietnam when you volunteered? I didn't have any expectations, where I was going to go. The first, stop was. Is it, Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois. I was, went to tech school for being an aircraft maintenance officer course that they had there.

00;09;21;13 - 00;09;53;22

And it was, pretty extensive on different systems hydraulics, electronics, pneumatics, all aircraft systems, but, didn't have any expectations after that where I, where I would go. So, so you didn't know what you were going to do had it. No idea where the Air Force was going to send me. What, if anything, did you know about the country of Vietnam before you volunteered?

00;09;53;25 - 00;10;06;10

I just, my only exposure to, Vietnam was what? What was on the 6:00 news overnight, and.

00;10;06;12 - 00;10;45;29

And, After the aircraft maintenance officer school. My dad, had orders to go to Vietnam. And at that time, like I say, I was a patriotic, person who wanted to serve the country. And with my dad being in Vietnam, that just encouraged me to volunteer, make a volunteer statement. Before graduation from aircraft maintenance school in the Air Force, honored my wishes.

00;10;46;02 - 00;11;12;18

So was that your dad's first time going to Vietnam? Yes. Yes. That's correct. And how did your family react to that? Well, it was just a it was a tough time on my mother, having her husband and son in Vietnam and, my sister Kathy, she, she was married, and so she was living in little Rock, Arkansas at the time.

00;11;12;18 - 00;11;19;28

So she was all alone. And it was it was a tough time for my mother.

00;11;20;01 - 00;11;47;15

How would you describe your ROTC training? ROTC training was, just basically, military regiment. It really didn't, it military regiment in history. It really didn't teach you, any technical skills. And, that's.

00;11;47;17 - 00;12;19;12

The. Would you describe the training as difficult or easy? It's safe to say that the, aircraft, its officer, of course, was pretty technical. And, it it, you had you had to do a lot of studying and, comprehend, the systems. But it didn't teach you a specific aircraft. It just taught you systems. And was there a physical component to that, too?

00;12;19;15 - 00;12;28;17

There was no physical component to. It was a six hours of, classwork every day. And then study.

00;12;28;17 - 00;12;36;04

Okay. I'd like to move on to your time in Vietnam. Did anything stick out to you about your flight to Vietnam?

00;12;36;04 - 00;13;04;02

Yeah. It was it was pretty long flight. I had to report to March Air Force Base in California, where they, took us out, to the firing range and put an M-16 in our hands, and, try to get us familiar with the with the weapon before we go to Vietnam.

00;13;04;04 - 00;13;48;15

And, then the flight going over, we stopped it. Why in Hawaii? To gas up and, then straight to, Tanzania Air Base in Saigon. It was a about an 18 hour journey. And when we were getting, getting close to, the Vietnamese soils, looking out the airplane window there, just massive jungles and, the flight going into towns, new eyes looking out the windows and looking at, all the aircraft on the ground and saying back bunkers everywhere, military equipment.

00;13;48;17 - 00;14;07;15

And I'm thinking, what in the hell did I get myself into? So it was, shock and fear. So could you describe your first 24 to 48 hours in country? The.

00;14;07;17 - 00;14;40;12

They set me up for, for housing, and they put me in, for the first week or so, they put me into a barracks with the F-4 fighter pilots and, really, Didn't know what to expect in that first, first night, the sirens went off, and, the gentleman that I was rooming with, he says, get down.

00;14;40;14 - 00;15;13;12

And we pulled the mattresses over ourself in case, for little protection in case the barracks was hit by by rockets. So, that that was a fearsome moment. And, like I said, I didn't know what to expect going over. I feel like as really ill prepared to know what to expect. You mentioned the firearms, shooting range in California.

00;15;13;13 - 00;15;29;07

Was that your first time handling weapons with the military? No, no, I have been to the, firing range 2 or 3 other times and at different bases. Okay, so just a little bit of firearms experience before Vietnam. Yeah.

00;15;29;09 - 00;15;59;00

What did you expect when you arrived in Vietnam based on TV or stories you'd heard? I really didn't know what to expect. Like us. Like I say, The tech schools, you know, they it it just wasn't any preparation or or, you know, what kind of an aircraft you're going to work on? What environment you're going to be.

00;15;59;00 - 00;16;37;25

There's a number of, bases that you could be sent to, and you don't know what what the activity is. Around each and every one of them. What most surprised you or was different from what you expected? Well, I just really didn't know what to expect. And, and the. Thing is that, you, you learn, some of the things to do to protect yourself in case of,

00;16;37;27 - 00;17;05;09

Eventual, rocket attacks or invasion of the base. So, but, when I first got to, to go to work on the flight line after a couple of weeks there, and there was a. Yeah, they didn't issue US guns because this was 69 in 1968, you had the Tet Offensive, and everybody had had a weapon at that time.

00;17;05;11 - 00;17;40;15

And I think there was a lot of, casualties, from friendly fire it during the Tet Offensive. So they, they deemed that they would, not arm the folks that are on the flight line on the base, depending on their or their job and career fields. But the first sergeant came to me and explained that, you know, why we didn't have have weapons.

00;17;40;15 - 00;18;06;22

And he said, but I'm going to give you something that you're really not supposed to have. He said, here's the key to that kind of Xbox. It's a large metal box, he says. That's where all the guns and ammunition are stored in case that you need to get into it, in case we, you know, had another event like Tet in 69.

00;18;06;25 - 00;18;39;09

And, that responsibility of having that key to just start handing out firearms and ammunition for a 22, 23 year old, second lieutenant. That just guy just put his feet on Vietnam's soil. It was, it was a felt like a heavy burden for a whole year. And there were a number of times where where I, where I almost come close to to, maybe opening that box.

00;18;39;09 - 00;19;16;14

And I prayed and prayed and prayed that I never would have to do it. And I still have that key today. Really? So you mentioned earlier about your dad that he went over before you did. How long had he been there when you arrived? He he's probably there for maybe, two months, sir. And as you communicate with you about what he was seeing over there, we we, through his time at my time there, we were able to communicate through telephone, telephone conversations occasionally.

00;19;16;16 - 00;19;31;09

But, you know, he really didn't, didn't have much to tell me what to expect. Do you remember having to adjust to the heat or humidity or any smells?

00;19;31;12 - 00;20;17;18

Yeah. The the heat is extremely intensive, and the monsoon season is, an amazing event to witness. You, when the rain comes, you can see it coming at you. It's just like a massive wall coming right at you. And, it would, get so deep that the water would flood into the, the truck. So the expediter truck going up and down the flight line and, it would even leave, occasionally you'd find few fish.

00;20;17;20 - 00;20;47;08

And when it monsoon season hit, you couldn't tell where the sidewalk walks or the roads were, and, you could make a misstep and you'd be over your head in water in some of the ditches. So. So that was a, an amazing event. And as far as smells go, first 2 or 3 times I was able to go downtown Saigon.

00;20;47;10 - 00;21;21;06

There's a lot of street vendors, and the, the Asian people eat a lot of different things that we don't. And they get a lot of street food, the, out there and the vendors and walking by them, it, that there's some of the odors and smells were so putrid that, you'd gag. It took took me 3 or 4 times to, get used to it when I wouldn't have a reaction to it.

00;21;21;08 - 00;21;49;29

Would you describe yourself as being in combat in the rear or something else? Say that again. Would you describe yourself as being in combat in the rear or something else? No. Well, we were in combat. We, we were in recon. Squadron. But, I mean, you're working 12, 14 hours shift and you're you're loading.

00;21;50;02 - 00;22;18;03

Not necessarily. Bombs and bullets were in recon Squadron, were getting films, film and camera ready, and we had to, had to, work with the, operations folks, as to what kind of cameras, what kind of photos they want to take. Hi pans, little pans, forward looking radars and different things. But, we were prepared for combat.

00;22;18;05 - 00;22;40;27

We knew it could happen at any time. You had to be aware of your, a living on the base. You always had to have an awareness about you, because every now and then, there would be somebody that, you know, go to a latrine, flush the toilet, and boom, it was rigged to a grenade.

00;22;40;27 - 00;23;04;26

So. So you had people on base that that were rigging booby traps, and you just didn't know. What it could be. It could be an empty box sitting on a on a underneath seat in a bus somewhere, or a grenade rigged to a device that people use. Every day. So what kind of work did you do in Vietnam?

00;23;04;29 - 00;23;36;19

I worked on the night shift. I was, late night shift supervisor for the squadron, and we would, repair the, RF for aircraft and prep them for a flight. We started a launch on airplanes at 5:00 in the morning, and then, then my shift would be over about six, 7:00, and, the aircraft continued to launch through the day.

00;23;36;19 - 00;24;28;12

Come back. And it was just the same thing day after day after day. You do the maintenance launcher load the, load the cameras. Or if it was

another base, they'd be loading bombs and bullets and flying their missions. And it was on a couple of occasions. Where we had, aircraft that had crashed due to ground, perhaps, enemy activity, or hydraulic failures and, and that that year we did lose, two crew members and, that sticks with you pretty hard,

00;24;28;15 - 00;25;01;00

So, so your primary role was as an airplane mechanic. Supervisor of the mechanics. Making sure reviewing all the documents and records, making sure that the aircraft were indeed, properly, maintained and, prepped for the next, next flight and releasing the aircraft. Authorizing release of the aircraft for, for the crew members to command,

00;25;01;17 - 00;25;05;00

Did you learn any Vietnamese words or phrases during your tours?

00;25;05;00 - 00;25;27;20

A few, not many. I didn't get to get down to them that much. Do you remember any of them? Few. Yeah. So dinky down. And crazy. And,

00;25;27;22 - 00;26;04;28

I really can't recall any. It's been a long time since. And since then. Yeah. How would you describe the people you served with in terms of economic background, race or religion? Well, there in Vietnam, you were, you know, you were working with, young crew chiefs. You know, some of some were from Tennessee, silver from New York, some of them from Oklahoma, you know, just scattered all over, all over the country.

00;26;05;01 - 00;26;39;02

And, there was really, you know, no relevance as, as as to, race or religious beliefs. They had their jobs there, and you had your job to do, and you work together. It was, gigantic ball of teamwork. Looking back, were they diverse in terms of race?

00;26;39;05 - 00;27;12;17

No, I don't I don't believe so. Yeah. What about economic background? Was there a variety of people that you served with repeat in terms of economic background? Was there a variety of people that you served with? There probably probably was. If there was, I wasn't aware of it. You know, we we were all there to do to do your job and, and contribute to the mission.

00;27;12;19 - 00;27;53;07

You know, there was one one fella we did have a conscientious objector, and, he didn't want to, do anything that would really contribute to the, to the war effort physically. But I gotta give this young man credit. He was, he worked in the in the office is admin, supervisor. And, it was very nice, gentleman, he was a college educated and, did an amazing job keeping, keeping the administrative of things going.

00;27;53;09 - 00;28;35;07

And nobody had any heartache about about his beliefs. Do you know if he was a conscientious objector because of religion or morals? I, I can't address that. I don't yeah, okay, but you said he was treated just fine on base. Yeah, yeah. Did you work alongside any women, either Vietnamese or American? Not in Vietnam and, not in my, time in, in Thailand, but, the women started to come in about 1971, 72, as a crew chiefs.

00;28;35;09 - 00;28;59;26

And, I was at Naval and Air Force base at that time. And, there was a lot of, I don't know if it's resentments or jokes, but, when I had a crew chief coming out to an aircraft to work on his aircraft, he carried his toolbox. Some of the females, didn't have the physical strength to.

00;28;59;28 - 00;29;44;17

Hoist their own toolboxes. But, I did find that, so later on, the F-4 aircraft has phase inspections. Yeah. Six phases that you go through every time he gets a get, the required number of flight hours. And I found out that during the phase inspections, the, female crew chiefs mechanics were did a better job in the phase inspections than, maybe the, the man or boys did because they the man.

00;29;44;19 - 00;30;07;11

They knew where the screwdriver was. It knew where the hammer is. And they, figured that, Oh, I know how to air up a strut everything and not necessarily follow the guidelines in the take orders. Where the where the, females, they would be reading the instructions, the technical orders, and do it exactly the way the book says to do it.

00;30;07;13 - 00;30;28;24

Now, do something because you remembered what what to do. And so was that happening during your during your time in Vietnam or. No, this was at, Eglin Air Force Base in Florida when I got back from Vietnam.

And what years were that that would have been, 70th March, April, May 70th. Okay. So right after you left Vietnam.

00;30;28;24 - 00;31;04;25

Yes. Okay. You mentioned earlier that you went into Saigon a few times. Did you have any memorable encounters with Vietnamese women in Saigon? Did you have any memorable encounters with Vietnamese women in Saigon? No comment. Okay. How did living in Vietnam and meeting Vietnamese people affect you? The. It's not just the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese are good people. But it's not just Vietnamese.

00;31;04;28 - 00;31;47;25

Asian people are good. And with my travels all through Europe is a young man, And even being behind the Iron Curtain and being. I've been to China, all the people, people in these countries eat every country are good people. It's the governments that make the difference in, I've got good friends from all ethnicities. So would you say living in Vietnam and seeing the normal people just trying to live their lives, did that change your resolve of why you were there in the first place?

00;31;47;27 - 00;32;09;19

At the time, no, it didn't change. Changed my resolve. Basically we're we're in, South Vietnam and, you know, the people there were pretty much had the same resolve we did. What do you remember about Vietnamese children?

00;32;09;22 - 00;32;38;05

I can't say that I really had any contact with, with the Vietnamese that had had children. See, we work at work at night shift and, you know, 12, 14 hours a day. And when you're finished with that, you just want to get back to your bunk. So. So, contact, social contact with Vietnamese really didn't have any.

00;32;38;08 - 00;33;02;05

And I meant to ask this earlier, but you were stationed in Tanzania for your service. Is that correct? In Vietnam, were you stationed in Tanzania or were you traveling around south Vietnam? No, I was, stationed at Townsend, okay. For the duration of your tour, for the duration of the tour. Okay. Do you remember any distinct animals during your time in Vietnam?

00;33;02;07 - 00;33;42;24

Animals? Yes. Yes. Rats. They were huge. And at night, about 2:00 in the morning, between 2 and 3, we'd have to take our vehicles up to the

motor pool to gas up and the route we would take to get there past the, Vietnamese, administrative offices where they process in and out of young Vietnamese, soldiers and they're lined up on the streets or on the sidewalks.

00;33;42;24 - 00;34;12;07

They're sleeping. I mean, hundreds and hundreds of them sleeping in the gutters of the street and on the sidewalks in there, cuddled up for warmth. And there rats crawling all over them. I every time we go to the motor pool, you witness the same thing. And, I just amazed me how they can sleep with these vermin crawling all over.

00;34;12;10 - 00;34;35;16

So did you have any pets while you were in Vietnam? I did not have any pets, but the squadron had a pet. It was a, a dog. His name was Buster and Buster. When he knew the, the but all the bus routes on the base. And he would he would if he wanted to go to the flight line.

00;34;35;16 - 00;35;06;17

If he was down by the pigs, it stay by the bus stop. The bus would stop, let Buster on and then when, Buster walked up to the front of the bust, the bus drivers stop and let Buster off wherever he wanted to get off, and he would, travel down, get off at the bus stop. And he he had wandered down the flight line and, mingle around with people.

00;35;06;17 - 00;35;37;03

And a lot of times in the evening, you see, he was, spent a lot of time with the crew chiefs in their barracks, but, Buster had, scars all over him from, fighting rats. And, and there were a few other where there were several dogs on base that resembled Buster, but they were younger than he was.

00;35;37;05 - 00;35;42;22

So. So he had, he had some lady friends somewhere.

00;35;42;24 - 00;35;53;12

You were happy to have him because he would attack the rats? Yeah. It was always a pleasure to see Buster. He was a friendly dog.

00;35;53;14 - 00;36;04;11

So I guess sort of building off of, your story about the rats. Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam?

00;36;04;14 - 00;36;49;25

No, I, I, I don't think I did, Because I've as, as a young teenager, I've been to so many countries and, and witnessed their, their cultures and been around, around a lot of people and, and different churches and, you know, a lot of the, Vietnamese, you know, the, their religions, Buddhist accept it. Just and there were a lot of lot of Catholics, a lot of Catholicism in, in Vietnam as well.

00;36;49;27 - 00;37;13;00

So had you been to Asia before 1969? No. Yeah. But, while I was, there and you may ask the questions later about, some of the time off that I did have or. So.

00;37;13;08 - 00;37;15;29

Did you personally encounter the Vietcong?

00;37;19;21 - 00;37;39;29

I would say I probably did, but not without my knowledge. Because you don't they all look alike. You know, you don't know who's a, who's a Vietcong and, and who's not the

00;37;40;01 - 00;37;56;19

You know, if it's the barber, the guy, the sweeping the floor, I just don't know. You mentioned attacks on base earlier. Yeah, we did, we did have some attacks on the base.

00;37;56;22 - 00;38;23;05

We had a lot of, rockets coming into the base occasionally. If we needed a part, my, maintenance superintendent, I would take my truck and we'd go out to the aircraft boneyard, and, it's out on the perimeter of the base dark, and we'd be searching for the part, and there could be a red flare go up.

00;38;23;06 - 00;38;51;01

Mean that there's contact with the enemy, and you hear the gunfire. You don't know which way where it's coming from and know we just had to get our tail out of the way back to the truck as quick as we could. Come back another day. So. Some Vietnam War scholarship has mentioned that as the commercial planes were flying in with new recruits to Vietnam, they would be fired on.

00;38;51;03 - 00;39;22;25

Did you experience that at Tanzania? No. Yeah. So it was mostly quiet except for these ambushes. Yeah. And you just, just didn't know when it was going to happen. Now, there was one, one incident, there a town snoot. They had two large water towers and, Christmas season was coming up. So I don't know if somebody had the bright idea that having Christmas lights all over the water towers.

00;39;22;27 - 00;39;47;14

Well, those lights didn't stay on the water towers very long because that, gave the, Viet Cong could see those things from miles away and give them something to armor. And, sure enough, we encountered a number of rocket attacks that, before there was lights came down in a hurry. So, yeah.

00;39;48;01 - 00;39;50;17

Do you remember seeing Agent Orange being sprayed?

00;39;54;14 - 00;40;23;02

The answer to that question is no, but I've flown on, some, on a C-47 that was rigged to spray Agent Orange. And I've also flown on a C-130 that was rigged to spray Agent Orange. But it wasn't currently spraying. They were not spraying at the time. I was, on the aircraft. And did you ever load or oversee the loading of Agent Orange canisters?

00;40;23;06 - 00;40;39;13

No. Yeah. No. Just, just film on cameras. Were you concerned at the time, even being in a plane that wasn't actively spraying about Agent Orange?

00;40;39;15 - 00;41;00;26

At the time, I really, really didn't know that much about Agent Orange. And there. So I really wasn't concerned about it. But in later years, I have,

00;41;00;28 - 00;41;21;27

Had done numerous, heart cancer associations, and I have a systemic heart disease. I've had open heart surgery, and, the VA determines it probably was, it's a scary car disease result from, Agent Orange. So, I'm sorry to hear that.

00;41;21;27 - 00;41;24;24

What were some of the ways you coped with the war?

00;41;29;06 - 00;41;35;05

Well, it,

00;41;35;08 - 00;41;44;07

It was good to,

00;41;44;09 - 00;42;21;15

To have. Occasionally get downtown cigarets. And but, it was really just pretty much the same routine day in and day out. It's not like you could, hop on an airplane at your choice and, go to the beach or so. There really wasn't much, recreational activities for that year. It was just, put your nose to the grindstone.

00;42;21;17 - 00;42;43;05

And then luckily, all the crew chiefs and folks that, worked under my shifts, the time I was there, everybody made it home. So did you do any drinking or smoking?

00;42;43;07 - 00;43;15;10

You say drinking? Yes. Yes, I did, did have a refrigerator and, in, my hutch and, the, alcohol, beer, alcohol was, pretty available on, on the base. You can buy a case of beer for $2. You can buy a bottle of Crown Royal for $4. Those prices are gone. Almost incentivizing you to drink the $4.

00;43;15;13 - 00;43;45;09

Yeah. You mentioned earlier, R&R. Where did you go on R&R? I went to, Sydney, Australia for an hour and it was nice. While you're in Vietnam, you didn't you don't wear civilian clothes. But going on on an hour, you're able to, put on a pair of slacks. Nice shirt. Leave your jungle boots.

00;43;45;11 - 00;44;15;20

Back in Vietnam, and we got on the DC eight and got out on the runway, and he puts the throttle to the engines. And the feeling that I had when I felt those wheels, when the aircraft started to rotate up and you hear the wheels come up, it's just, an exhilarating feeling to be off the ground.

00;44;15;20 - 00;44;38;05

Vietnam is, it's just a feeling. It's just hard to explain to. You.

Were excited to leave? Yeah. Felt it. So I spent a week, weekend in Australia, and,

00;44;38;07 - 00;45;14;24

Did a little, little touring, took a, first night, went on a harbor cruise dinner cruise. And they had a band. Nice dinner. And, they had, they had, a lot of folks up on the ferry and the bands playing. And there was I saw a lady across the boat, and, I had a glass of Scotch and water, and there's so many people just kind of like shoulders, shoulders.

00;45;14;26 - 00;45;44;14

And, I asked the person next to me if she could, hold my drink, and she says, why? I said, well, I want to go dance with the lady over there. And she said, what's wrong with me? And I looked at her and I said, nothing. So, so, we struck up a friendship and, she,

00;45;44;16 - 00;46;22;22

Tours gave me tours, of, Sydney. We, went, she take me to nice restaurants and, took me to the zoo and. It it was a good experience. What took took me a little bit to the outback out in the country. And so we corresponded for a little while after I got back to Vietnam. And what was that like, having to go back after the week?

00;46;22;25 - 00;46;53;26

Well, you feel a little bit refresh, but you know what you're in for. So. You mentioned during the pre-interview that your father would sometimes visit you in Vietnam. Yes. Yeah. My dad, ran the base laundry at the toy air base, and, he knew all the well. So it was a small base. I mean, you know, where everybody, the cooks know where you and you know, that cooks.

00;46;53;28 - 00;47;25;00

And, so when he was coming, coming down to make a visit, he'd bring, suitcases full of steaks, chicken, pork chops, dehydrated shrimp. He had access to things I didn't have access to, and even had mushrooms and mushroom sauce to put on the steaks when the folks in my barracks were barbecue. Q had a good time, so it was good.

00;47;25;02 - 00;48;14;03

I got up to see dad, two times. So. And, there wasn't much to do. It took a while. You just really couldn't couldn't get after him off the base. It was right on the train to see him. So how often did your dad visit you? He he, he came to Saigon three times, and, it was, he was

telling me that we would catch a Korean flight into a camera on Bay and then Cameron Bay into town and out, and they decided to, cancel letting Americans fly on on the Korean flights.

00;48;14;05 - 00;48;47;04

So dad was pretty good friends with the, fellow that ran the base operations. And dad was talking to him, and he said, don't worry about it. He says, you have a you have a Korean name. And Nassif, what do you mean? He said, well, it's Chow chow ski where it's now. Lang oh 3 or 4 syllables of, Korean names.

00;48;47;06 - 00;49;18;04

So, so dad went in there, fellas, reading the manifest, and the guy reads dad's name. Chow chow ski. Dad's in his, Air Force, fatigues, uniform. He walks up and the guy looks and he says, you're not Korean. This is have a Korean name. The guy said, get on. So he would fly private down to you on a Korean airline?

00;49;18;07 - 00;49;41;03

Well, no, not a Korean airline. Korean, C-130 military aircraft. Okay. Yeah. The Koreans, soldiers, you'd have the air base and the, Korean soldiers would, guard and protect the perimeter of the air bases.

00;49;41;06 - 00;49;52;28

What was the most beautiful thing that you saw in Vietnam?

00;49;53;01 - 00;50;27;25

I there's, there's nothing that, really strikes me at the moment. Now, the French had, had Vietnam for many years. So some of the, architecture, downtown was, was pretty interesting. And the and the, the food, Vietnamese food was the French. But.

00;50;27;27 - 00;50;53;09

Mixture. They very, a lot of the restaurants were, were extremely good. The Vietnamese Officers Club, had had a very, very nice, restaurant that, that served a mixture of French and Vietnamese food. But, yeah. So you would say the food and the architecture. Yeah.

00;50;53;09 - 00;50;57;21

Who did you write to or receive letters from while you were in Vietnam?

00;51;01;23 - 00;51;34;12

Well, my mother, of course, she, she always wrote in for special occasions. She would, send me a box full of chocolate chip cookies and, for my birthday, she sent a box and it had a yellow cake make. She knew I liked yellow cake with, chocolate frosting. So the cake came in a box, and it was a can of, chocolate frosting.

00;51;34;15 - 00;52;02;05

So I took it down to the flight line that night, and, opened the box in the expediter truck, and the expediter stopped by every revetment and frost in that cake. And I gave all the crew chiefs, shared shared my birthday cake with me. So that was, that was pretty good. But letters.

00;52;02;07 - 00;52;40;20

Now, my, I had a girlfriend my senior year, and, went to, Yeah. And never heard from her for three months, and, she got a letter saying she we have she met somebody else, married another fella. These are, If that hadn't happened that way, I probably would have, went a half an hour to, Hawaii and maybe got engaged or married there, but there was, some friends.

00;52;40;23 - 00;53;15;29

Rantoul, Illinois is just outside of Champaign. Urbana University of Illinois, and we met some graduate students there and, some, ladies and gentlemen, in the when we go, go, became good friends with them. And there was this one, graduate student that wrote to me a couple times a month the whole time I was there.

00;53;16;01 - 00;53;44;24

And, she would send me books and other little, little gifts, things to occupy my time. And, I forget what her name was, but, that's one of the things that, helped. Keep my spirits up that she, somebody that you really didn't know cared enough to write to you a couple times a month.

00;53;44;26 - 00;54;18;11

And when I, when I got back, back home. My folks were in, Upper Peninsula, Michigan, and I bought a car, and when I. She was from Saint Louis, and I had her phone number and, stopped. Saint Louis visitor thanked her for for how she kept my spirits up in there. So last time I talked to a senior.

00;54;18;13 - 00;54;46;08

You mentioned earlier talking on the phone with your father. Were you able to communicate back to the States as well? It seems like, maybe on a couple of occasions that if the, base operators, weren't too busy, that they were able to connect me, to my mother back home a couple of times. And then occasionally I talked to my, my dad, up in, two, 1 or 2.

00;54;46;10 - 00;55;02;06

And to another friend of mine, Glen Lee, who was, good friend. He was at food camp flying, Air Force.

00;55;02;08 - 00;55;11;19

Do you remember any American TV shows or songs from your time in Vietnam?

00;55;11;21 - 00;55;38;11

No, I can't say that. Had to do, sir. That just, Just, didn't. I had a radio, but, like you say, when you finish your days, your shift work and everything, you just just really didn't, I didn't have much time to listen to the radio.

00;55;38;13 - 00;55;45;28

Do you have any memories of USO shows or other recreation on base?

00;55;46;01 - 00;56;19;22

Well. There were. There weren't any, during my time period. I don't think there were any shows. The USO shows that came into town center. I was there when President Nixon flew into Saigon. And, they had a pretty strict, perimeter around, ground Air Force One aircraft, and but he was only a few few blocks from where I was working.

00;56;19;24 - 00;56;37;19

Did you get to see Nixon? No, I wasn't able to. Yeah. Did you hear anything about his visit? Not really. I just knew he was there, but just kind of business as usual. Yeah.

00;56;37;21 - 00;57;15;10

Some bases, some American bases in Vietnam had swimming pools or bowling or other sort of recreational activities like that. Did you participate in any of that? They did have a, they did have a gymnasium. It was an outdoor. Type of, gym. Went to play play basketball occasionally. That's been in. What was your most expensive or frequent purchase at the.

00;57;15;12 - 00;57;50;06

My zenith transoceanic radio. It was, $199. And what did you use that for? I just, just kept it in my room. When I was there, a just, it would pick up, stations all around the world. So, just, you could get BBC, all kinds of different, foreign, radios stations come in.

00;57;50;09 - 00;58;12;29

So it was just kind of spending time playing with it. Were you spending were you, tuning into more news channels or music or what were you listening to? Well, a lot of it, it would be. It would be just a combination of, music or news. It's just what you could pick up for the day.

00;58;16;13 - 00;58;34;07

Did you order anything from the catalog? No. Did you buy any Vietnamese souvenirs?

00;58;34;10 - 00;59;07;19

No. But when my dad had come down with, we'd go downtown Saigon, hit a lot of the shops and looking around. And there was this one store that, had an elephant's leg in it, and it was about a foot and a half tall, and it was, the wastebasket. And then, every time we do it come.

00;59;07;19 - 00;59;38;15

There we go. See if were still, still in the shower, but, You could in Vietnam. China, Hong Kong. I mean, you could buy anything you wanted, whether legal or illegal. Wow. Well, that's the end of my service. Questions? Is there another story we haven't talked about from your time in Vietnam that you'd like to share?

00;59;38;18 - 01;00;12;03

With the. Yeah, I mentioned, Glen Lee Dan was the Air Force recruiter in Iowa City, Iowa, in, I met Glenn through my father. Glenn became like, a member of the family. His family was in Hawaii. Glenn was a Chinese, Mongolian descent. And nice fella. He had a key to the house. He could come and go as he pleased.

01;00;12;06 - 01;00;50;23

He ate with us. He he stayed overnight. Yeah. In there. He was like a brother. Dad. Put him in the Air Force. And Glenn qualified for, flight training and Air Force, and Glenn, finished flight training were sent to Vietnam, and, got to talk to Glenn on the phone. And,

several times, mom and dad went to, Hawaii.

01;00;50;29 - 01;01;30;14

They met Glenn's parents, and, they thanked the mom and dad and the family for taking Glenn under under the family wings. And in there, helping him out there. Family loved him. I mean, he was just he was a member of the family. And Lance folks treated mom and dad quite well in Hawaii. And her. Then later on, dad whales.

01;01;30;16 - 01;01;53;25

Reassigned to Upper Upper Peninsula, Michigan. And they received a letter from, Glenn's folks and that, Graham had been shot down over Cambodia and it was missing in action in.

01;01;53;27 - 01;02;04;24

Glenn never came back. Is, is on the,

01;02;04;27 - 01;02;27;10

Thing. Remembrance of, Glenn is on the Vietnam War hall in Washington, DC. It's his name. There's a heartbreaking. Thank you very much for sharing that. Yeah.

01;02;28;21 - 01;02;35;20

Let's talk about your postal service life. What relationship in your life was most changed by your service?

01;02;35;20 - 01;02;43;01

Oh.

01;02;43;04 - 01;03;17;20

Well, the, you know, my, career path from aircraft maintenance officer. I, after I was stationed at, Eagle on the Air Force base, I, volunteered to go back to Southeast Asia, and they sent me to, Thailand. I was at Crown Air Base in Thailand, and, I'm going through, newspapers and every everything of the Air Force terms.

01;03;17;22 - 01;03;59;20

And the, Air Force needed, manufacturing officers. The, Air Force Institute of Technology had an education with industry program, so I applied for it. And, I was accepted. There was one of 14 students in there went, went to study with, and work with Hughes Aircraft Company, Culver City, California, and, Hughes Aircraft. We had full access to

anything and everything that Hughes Aircraft did.

01;03;59;22 - 01;04;36;20

Whether it's a civilian manufacturing or military military, manufacturing. And we even got to meet, you know, the top supervisors, of, of the company. And from there, I was, selected to be the F-15 manufacturing officer at the program office in Dayton, Ohio, when the air 15 was just going into production. So I, kind of changed career paths, got into a contract administration quality assurance.

01;04;36;23 - 01;05;10;15

So you'd say the biggest change in your life after Vietnam was career trajectory. And so that year, the biggest change in your life, post-Vietnam was your career. Yeah. To to expand my career into different, different fields and, and, advanced my education. I was able to get a master's degree in management supervision. Air Force considered made a manufacturing engineer and a took a no other courses to where I held it.

01;05;10;15 - 01;05;42;01

Yeah. Professional, certification as a contract administrator. Did your relationship with your parents change at all after you came back? Well, you know, when I left Vietnam, I, Went to visit my parents in Upper Peninsula, Michigan, and, I was looking for, for car and, but spending time with, a week with my mom and dad was good.

01;05;42;03 - 01;06;07;25

But after about the third day, just having a conversation with my mother, and she says, you're not the same person. And I'm thinking to myself, I don't understand what you mean. And she says, you're just not the same person. And it probably took me, several years to understand what she was talking about. What was she talking about?

01;06;07;27 - 01;06;14;27

Well, I guess,

01;06;14;29 - 01;06;44;05

I took life a lot more seriously. And, I guess my. She recognized my thought processes and and, things were just just different. Did you know any anti-war veterans?

01;06;44;07 - 01;07;07;08

No, just they had, just that one. One fella that, was a conscientious

objector, but still did is, is service for the country. Were you aware of any active duty military personnel who opposed the war?

01;07;07;11 - 01;07;44;16

I can't say is that, yeah, I do that. Probably worked with with, some of them, after the war's over. Yeah. Okay. Who since the war have you talked to about Vietnam? Repeat employees who since the war have you talked to about your time in Vietnam? Oh, well, I'm a member of, the VFW. Here in Aiken, South Carolina, post five eight, seven, seven.

01;07;44;19 - 01;07;56;22

And, We've, got a number of members that are Vietnam veterans in.

01;07;56;25 - 01;08;10;16

A lot of them, have post-traumatic, syndrome problems. And,

01;08;10;19 - 01;09;06;27

I meet with a number of them, and, we try I try to console and and comfort some of them. A some some of these folks have some serious, physical and mental issues. And even, folks from the Middle East War, young men, that, I've met with him, join the members, oppose it. I've tried to guide and counsel on is able to help 2 or 3 of them get get to the right places to get the, the physical in mental care that they need.

01;09;06;27 - 01;09;10;22

And I still do that today.

01;09;11;14 - 01;09;13;07

Have you been to the wall in DC?

01;09;13;07 - 01;09;44;02

I have not, my, my dad has been there, and I have, rubbings of, Glen Lee's name. But, I have been to the, there's a wall that moves around the country. You know, I've been to that 2 or 3 times. And did you find Glen's name on the wall?

01;09;44;04 - 01;09;54;18

I have, I was that experience, just just,

01;09;54;20 - 01;10;09;03

Just heartbreaking. Yeah, sure. Would you like to go to the wall in DC? I probably will one day. I'd like to get there. So.

01;10;09;03 - 01;10;11;04

Have you been back to Vietnam?

01;10;11;04 - 01;10;32;16

I have not, that's another, trip I'd like to make. Do you would like to go back? I would, and what do you expect to see there? Why don't they, I, you know, I read about, some of the museums, about the war that the Vietnamese have.

01;10;32;19 - 01;11;02;06

And I'd like to go through some of the museums. I'd like to go back in, on Townsend. You, Of course, they may not, allow me to, venture where I'd like to go. Like to see the, see the building where I live in, outside the building. It, just on the road. Just, real close to the barracks.

01;11;02;08 - 01;11;39;02

There was a Vietnamese clinic, and they would bring Vietnamese soldiers in that were wounded. And, it was at night you would hear them screaming and and moaning and and crying from screaming from pain all through the night. And that's that's, it sticks in my memory very vividly to they. I don't think they got the medical care and attention.

01;11;39;02 - 01;12;22;17

It, that, we provided our soldiers. So you'd like to go back and see those places again? Yeah. Do you think that would be difficult to do? Well. It'll bring bring back memories and, Maybe. Or I can cope with, with some of those. Things that, occasionally pop up and cheer me up. This is my last question.

01;12;22;19 - 01;12;30;04

Do you have a favorite book, poem or movie about Vietnam?

01;12;30;07 - 01;13;07;21

The year, a movie with, Robin Williams, about Saigon. Good morning. Good morning. Vietnam. Yeah. I said, does that movie resonate with you from your experience in Vietnam? Pardon me. Does that movie resonate with you from your experience? Yeah, yeah. It did. The only thing about the movie that, I thought it was a natural is when they where

they were filming the country of Vietnam.

01;13;07;23 - 01;13;22;23

It was, the movie was very, sterilized and clean. Where where the actual countryside and the place that he would be were not. They were filthy.