

Hello, this is Cara Vanderree of the Ashland City Library. It is April 17, 2023, and today we are interviewing Rick Beeley of rural Comanche County. This interview is being done by the Ashland City Library through Humanities Kansas, in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read Project.

Cara: Rick, you served in the Vietnam War, but in what branch of service did you serve?

Rick: Marine Corps.

Cara: What was your rank when you left?

Rick: Captain.

Cara: Where did you serve?

Rick: In Vietnam? Da Nang, and then Chu Lai, and then Quang Tri and then back to Da Nang and the 1st Marine Division Headquarters.

Cara: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Rick: I enlisted.

Cara: When?

Rick: 1965

Cara: Where were you living when you enlisted?

Rick: It was the last semester of college at Alva, Oklahoma (Northwestern Oklahoma State University).

Cara: Did you get your degree before you enlisted?

Rick: I didn't get to go through the ceremony because I graduated in December and I was almost through Officer Candidate School when they graduated in Alva.

Cara: What was your degree?

Rick: Math and industrial education.

Cara: Why did you join?

Rick: I really wanted to learn to fly. Wayne Kinsey ran the airport at Alva; he gave me a job and I learned to fly there up through a private license. But I really wanted to learn to fly and of course the Marine recruiter said, "Sure, you can get jets!" Well, he couldn't guarantee me that, but anyway I've got 'em.

Cara: So that's why you picked the marines, so that you could fly?

Rick: Course, the Air Force... I had no idea what I was getting into when I joined the Marines! I tell you, that first ten weeks of Officer's Candidate School was pure hell. When we first got there, they were yelling at us and we felt like worms on the floor for several weeks. The physical regimen was really tough for a 120-pound kid that wasn't into sports. Of course, towards the end of the ten weeks it all turned around. Now, once a Marine, always Marine. But I had no idea what I was signing up for. I really just joined the Marines because of the Marine recruiter at Alva. You know, he was spit and polished.

Cara: Did he paint a rosy picture of your future?

Rick: Yes. He said, "You can get jets," but he couldn't guarantee me that. But since I already had a private (license) and flying was always so natural to me anyway, I excelled in everything except what they called, "Military Bearing." I guess I wasn't very good from the military bearing stand point.

Cara: What is "Military Bearing"?

Rick: Just to enjoy being spit and polished. Shining your shoes all the time and coming to work perfect, you know, in your uniform, because you'd get scolded if it wasn't perfect. I was more of a Gomer Pyle. I had two left feet. You know, that old show on T.V. with Gomer Pyle.



Cara: Yes. Gomer Pyle. Did you gain weight in basic?

Rick: Oh yes, I went in at 120 and ten weeks later I weighed 134.

Cara: And they muscled you up.

Rick: Yes, yes!

Cara: You've already described your first days in service as probably a lot of running. Did they get you up at 4:30 to go run five miles before breakfast?

Rick: I don't remember that, but our barracks were right on the Potomac River, at Quantico, Virginia, and we were up at daybreak out in front of the barracks there facing the Potomac doing PT. Of course, we had forced marches later. But all the way

through that 10 weeks, it was not only classroom study, but it was physical activities too, of course. So anyway, yes.

Cara: What were they trying to teach you in your classroom studies?

Rick: Military bearing, for one thing, and how to use a rifle. You know, every Marine's a rifleman, even the pilot. And Marine Corp history, you're really indoctrinated. Like I said, "Once a Marine, always a Marine." Now, when you see another Marine, you say, "Semper Fi," on the way by. It's just the way it is, if you're a Marine. The Air Force has their airmen and their officers, the Army has soldiers and officers, Navy has enlisted and officers. Marines are just Marines. You know, there's not that kind of differentiation between the enlisted and the officers. It's just a unique branch of service, that's what the Marine Corps is.

Cara: And you chose that because they had a very good recruiter.

Rick: Yes, and of course it worked out well because I got jets. In the Air Force, once you got to a squadron after flight training, if you got jets, fighter-type jets, you might be in the back seat of an Air Force Phantom with some colonel up front flying. As soon as I checked into Cherry Point, after the training command in September '67, they said, "Whatever airplane you want to fly on the base, you've got 24 hours to decide." Of course, there were Phantoms, F4s, or A4 Skyhawks. There was the C130. I could have even gone a step back, I thought, to helicopters. Of course, I didn't want that, but then there was the A6 Intruder. It was not a fighter, it was an attack jet. I wasn't aggressive enough to be a fighter pilot. So, with the A6, in the middle of the night, we'd turn our lights off and go into the clouds so nobody would see us, and we'd drop our bombs and come home. You know, that sort of thing, but the A6 fit me real well.

Cara: So that's what you chose.

Rick: A lot of times, it was a single airplane mission. Sometimes we did fly in formation, but a lot of times it was a single airplane, an Intruder. You know, we'd sneak in and sneak out. If it was a dive-bombing mission, we weren't exposed to enemy fire for very long. So anyway, it was a good choice. We dropped a lot of bombs.

Cara: Mostly on Laos? Where did you drop them?

Rick: Mostly in Vietnam, but then we'd go into Laos, even though it wasn't spoken about at the time. But we worked the Ho Chi Minh Trail at night, level bombing at 3,000 feet with mountains beside us because the Ho Chi Minh Trail was mostly in the valley. Of course, it was an all-weather airplane. So, on radar, you could see the mountains right beside us. It was systems bombing at night, the bombardier navigator being beside me. He was looking in his scope and seeing if he could find moving targets, that sort of thing.

Cara: Is that what you mean by "systems," using radar?

Rick: And of course, automatic bomb release. It was a sophisticated computer in the airplane at the time. So even though it was analogue, we didn't have digital back in the day, they said each airframe had 200 miles of wiring. It was a complicated little airplane.

Cara: That would weigh a lot, too.

Rick: Yeah, it weighed 60,000 pounds with fuel and bombs under it. All the bombs were external under the wings. We carried 28 500-pound bombs on each flight. Sometimes we fired rockets and CBU cluster bomb units and other things.

Cara: A twin screw truck weighs right at 20,000, so I'm a little bit shocked.

Rick: It was not a small plane. (Rick pulls pictures out to show) See all the bombs under that thing? Twenty-eight 500 pounders. If I'd dropped bombs every time on every mission, in six months, I'd have dropped a million pounds of bombs, but it wasn't always bombs.

Cara: What else would you drop besides bombs?

Rick: Oh, 2.75-inch rockets and five-inch rockets. I never dropped napalm, but sometimes at night in Laos, we'd drop the CBU Cluster Bomb Units. We'd drop a whole bunch of hand-grenade-type things in clam shells. You know, it looked like a bomb, but had all these... basically 200 or 300 in each, probably more than that. We carried maybe ten, and I remember one night, we turned upside-down after we dropped them. The clam shells opened and exposed the little grenade-type explosives. We dropped them on a train and it just looked like... we were watching it kind of upside-down and it just looked like 10,000 flash bulbs going off one after another down there for about a quarter mile. You know, we didn't see any secondary explosions. It was an adventure.

Cara: What is the difference between a rocket and a bomb?

Rick: These bombs, they were just gravity bombs. They just dropped off and they had little propellers on the front. When they left the airplane there was a wire going back to the bomb rack. The wire would come out and then the little propeller would start turning and set the fuse. Some of them we carried had a three-foot pipe extension so that bombs would go off three feet in the air. But if it went off on the surface... Then they had a delay on the fuse, that would put it just underground, about 10 feet or so before it went off. It would make a huge crater. Each bomb would make a 20-foot crater and 15 feet deep or 10 feet deep, maybe!

Cara: The picture that Rick is describing will be included in the interview photos.

Rick: Vietnam looked like the craters on the moon. Somewhere, we have some pictures of that, I'm sure, ground pictures.

Cara: Oh! Wow.

Rick: Yeah, that was me!

Cara: Sir, let me let me record several of your pictures when we're done with the interview. May I say that the summer dress uniform is nice.

Rick: Well, here's our dress uniform. We had a '64 GTO convertible and that's in front of our house out east of Coldwater when we came home on leave. That's the winter dress and this is a summer dress. Here's our everyday uniform. In the summer we didn't have to wear a tie and of course, the marine uniform. They call Marines "Leathernecks", because, look at that tight collar round your neck. In winter we had to wear a tie, but anyway, that's what it was.

Cara: Nice car too!

Rick: Yeah, there's another picture of our car. Should have kept that thing. We drove it here after we came home for several years. We let my sister-in-law and brother-in-law up in Minneola have it. You probably don't know them, but they've lived at Minneola forever. Jack and Susie Hubbard. Margo and Susie both grew up on a street west of downtown. So anyway!

Cara: Well, sir, going back to boot camp, do you remember any of your instructors?

Rick: That's a field south of where I grew up. I had the airplane back and had the gear and the flaps down making low passes and Mom was taking pictures.

Cara: Do you remember one of their names?

Rick: It was so regulated, regimented there in the OCS. We took a group picture before we graduated. There was about 40 of us in the class and I knew them well

enough. You didn't spend too much time visiting, even at night in the barracks, because they had you scrubbing floors or doing something. So, I knew the guys in the bunks right around me, but guys at the other end, I didn't know that well, but I knew them well enough to get their names down. There was a group picture including Platoon Sergeant, Karl Taylor, and he was a big guy. But I was reading the Stars Stripes Newspaper one day in Vietnam, and here's his picture on the front page. He was just posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. He stormed a machine gun nest or whatever to save his troops. So anyway, when we first visited the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, they had a catalog along with the wall, and on this catalogue was 58,000 plus names. I just took that picture (the photo of the men in his group photo) with all the names on the back and studied that catalogue for a little while. It looks like 16 out of 40 died. Sixteen out of 40, but they were young platoon leaders in 1968. And then of course, Sergeant Taylor died of course too. That's the way it was. Fortunately, I wasn't there during that time. Then in '69, when we were there, Johnson called the bombing halt over the north for that whole year. We didn't have to fly north in North Vietnam, because most of the POWs in North Vietnam were shot down over North Vietnam. I didn't have to deal with that. I wish I had that picture.

Cara: If you come up with it later, you know I'm putting this on our website, so if there are any pictures you want included in your interview, let me know.

Rick: I think it's on the wall back at the house. This photo was in basic training in Mississippi.

Cara: Which one was you?

Rick: Figure it out! I'm the one with the big ears. Then 40 years ago, I had these ears worked on. I hated those ears. The big nose doesn't bother me, but the ears did. A group picture after a four-plane flight and of course the instructor was in the fifth airplane. So that was the end of that phase of training.

Cara: What do you remember most about?

Rick: The training? Flying those jets! That was great. Of course, we flew the little T34, which was a modified Beechcraft Bonanza, different fuselage, same wings and everything. But there's me again. I was Student of the Month in the Training Command once and Student of the Week another time. I have a picture of that, too.

Cara: So, your bearing wasn't that bad.

Rick: Well, you know, the flying skills were great. September of '67, about a year and a half after we started flight training, we were naval aviators by then. We landed on the carrier one day. Well, several times, by then.

Cara: Which one? Which carrier?

Rick: The Lexington. It's a museum down at Corpus now. I've been on it several times. It's kind of, it's kind of a spiritual experience for me to get back on that thing. There's the T2, that was what we flew up in Meridian, Mississippi. Then we went out to Kingsville and flew the F9 Cougar. Of course, they've got an example. Most Navy/Marine Corps planes on that carrier now are in a museum and the F9 sitting out there on the flight deck... I take my log book now when I go somewhere and I've flown that airplane! That number was in my log book. Not this one of course, but the one on the carrier now. So, you know it was.

Cara: It wasn't destroyed, it was saved.

Rick: Yes, that one was, for the museum. (Noting another picture) Of course, there we are doing some formation flying. Well, actually, this was my first ride in a jet. Four students were finishing up the last flight of their program, so the instructor had me in the back seat and he was doing loops and all kinds of things out there. I got sick. I thought, "What am I getting into?"

Rick: This (picture) was Ryan. Remember Ryan? When he was an infant

Cara: I rode the bus with him for a bit, just a little bit, because you know they changed the routes.

Rick: He passed away 12 years ago and of course I guess I didn't need to bring this. I have it here, but my best friend at Cherry Point was a bombardier navigator and so we partied. This is Margo and this is Leslie, his wife. This was in '68. We were out on the beach having a picnic and there's Ryan and there's their two kids, Carrie and Greg. I keep up with Lesley, but of course Chuck, he was killed in Vietnam. They went down in an airplane in Laos that night. At any rate, we were just down in Pensacola about a year ago seeing Leslie and her second husband, who was also a marine pilot. Of course, Carrie is 50-some years old, so we saw her and her husband. So anyway, he was my best friend and I just didn't get close to anybody after he passed away and you know it was kind of tough. He was my roommate. That's the reason I went from Da

Nang to Chu Lai. They wanted to kind of break the outfit up. I volunteered to go down because Chuck was down there. He didn't last a week after I got there.

Then, of course, the evening he went out, it was a nighttime mission in Laos. The evening he and Steve, the pilot, went out, I ate with them. We had lobster and steak that night, which was terribly uncommon. But Steve Armstead, good friend, but not as close as Chuck and I were, he pulled a prayer card out. We got quiet to let him read that to himself; then we ate. Nobody ever did that, but he must have had a premonition he was going to die that night. That's my guess. Anyway, that night an Air Force C-130 was dropping flares over there in Laos because they had a truck on a bridge that was stopped and they were wanting to bomb that thing. We didn't dive bomb at night. We did it all the time in the daytime, 30-degree dive, 450 knots at 3,000 feet. Pull four G's, get rid of the bombs before we started pulling out, of course, but then we could get out of the area before the shrapnel came up and got the airplane. But anyway, we didn't do that at night, but they accepted the mission. And then the C-130 people reported the next day that they called in hot, which we did of course, and then we called off cold when we pulled off the target. Of course, on one run they called in hot, the bombs went off, and then there was another flash several hundred yards away. No more was heard from them.

We carried four survival radios, two in our vest and two on the seat pan. If you're going to eject, you were going to talk on the way down and tell somebody you'd survived so far. But anyway, nothing. The next day or two, I wrote Leslie and I said, "You know Leslie, they've just sent you a notice saying Chuck is missing in a form letter. If it was me, Margo would want to know what really happened." I explained what happened. They even went in the next day with photo recons, but the wreckage went down in three canopies of jungle over there, so they didn't find anything. So I wrote her a letter and told her that the chance that Chuck was gone was 99.9%. She got on with her life and married this other Marine Pilot Captain. He had to spend a year in Vietnam, too.

I got a picture of that couple, Carrie and Junior, her husband, when we were down there last fall. I've stopped to see Leslie, two or three times in the past, four maybe, in the last 50 years, so we kept up. In the year 2000, 31 years later (he died March of '69), all during that time in the back of my mind I thought, "What if Chuck walks out of that jungle somehow after all those years and she's gone on with her life?" It kind of bothered me in the back of my mind a little bit, but I felt like she deserved to know what we knew. I'd have probably got in trouble at the time for sending that letter. But at any rate, 31 years later, in the year 2000, Lesley called me. She said, "They're burying Chuck's remains at Arlington on Friday. I just want you to know, if you want to get back there." This was in the year 2000. They had gone in there and found that wreckage after 31 years and found one tooth of Chuck's. I mean it just went in like that (points straight down), it was a wonder they found anything, especially 31 years later. But they found one tooth and the DNA proved it was Chuck's. Of course, they

couldn't find any remains of Steve, the pilot. But a villager brought a dog tag out. You know, he had scrounged around that wreckage in the past. It was Steve's dog tag. It finalized that story, finally, and we've been back since, and I've got a picture of his military monument there at the Arlington Cemetery. So anyway, that's the story. Of course, it tells it here in this article too. But he came up through the enlisted program. They had a meritorious NCO program, non-commissioned officer, and he excelled as an enlisted man. He was in Washington D.C., at Marine Corps Headquarters. I don't know what it is, but it's nationally known as the 8th and 1st Marine Corps Headquarters in D.C. Of course, he was on that precision drill team, that silent team that twirls the rifles with the bayonets on, and you've seen them. He was on that team. And then when Kennedy died in November of '63, he was in the honor guard that took his body to the cemetery. And then Chuck got into the officer program. I've always said he was spit and polish. You can see by his picture, he was a spit and polish fellow. He was an ideal Marine and I don't know why we hit it off. Except he was from a small town in Mississippi, a farmer type, and I was farmer's kid. We flew together quite a bit, sometimes, especially checking an airplane out on the weekend from Cherry Point.

They'd just say, "Keep it in the continental United States." We were all over the United States at low levels. On nice weekends, I'd like to fly when the weather was good. So anyway, I always said he'd have been a general if he'd lived. But at any rate, one weekend we landed down at Columbus Air Force Base and his folks picked us up. We spent the weekend at his place and one weekend we came into McConnell and spent the weekend out here with the folk. The folks picked us up at McConnell. (Rick is momentarily overwhelmed) Memories do this.

Cara: I'm sorry.

Rick: Oh well, you know, it's ancient history. That was 53 years ago, one funny little story. Every time I go to Wichita on 160, you turn north three miles and go into Harper. On the west side, about half-way up there, it used to be red-brick house. They've recovered the siding now it was just basically a house at the time. Now there's a little auto-body repair shop. You know where I'm talking about, well anyway, we were heading to Wichita that day and we were a little bit ahead of schedule and I knew the folks wouldn't quite be there.

I said, "Chuck, let's just go out there and see if we can find them." Dad drove a white four-door '64 Chevy at the time and, approaching that stop sign from the west, there they were. So, we circled until they decided, "That's Rick and Chuck." They stopped right beside the yellow brick house and we were buzzing them and doing aileron rolls and having a good time right a mile or two south of Harper. I thought that even in Harper, they were wondering what the devil was going on. But every time I go to Wichita, I think of that. That was in the fall of '68. So that's been...

Cara: 55 years ago.

Rick: The fall of '68. But I think about it every time I'm going to Wichita. So yeah, so anyway we had a lot of fun.

Cara: They let you just take planes out and have a good time on the weekends? One: Did it keep you sharp or why would they do that? With what it costs to fly a plane...?

Rick: We could land anywhere on a military base and pump kerosene, basically kerosene. I think it only cost 10 cents then. But yeah, just keep it in the continental United States. It wasn't just Chuck. About once a month, in the 15 months at Cherry Point, I'd grab somebody that wanted to go out west. One friend, I can't think of his last name now. Roy, his folks were in Minneapolis and that was probably the day we were buzzing our house out here. But anyway, we ended up Minneapolis and after we'd been down in this country, that's the first time I came close to a flight violation. We were at 500 feet at 340 knots. Which we did all the time across the United States. And you know, you didn't go back and buzz somebody because they were probably pretty unhappy to start with, especially if they had livestock out in the pasture or turkeys. Turkeys hated airplanes! But at any rate, that's what we did and we spent the weekend with his folks.

Another story, we had just about finished a training drill in the F9, but there was a hurricane coming in. I forget the name of it, but it took out so many windows in Corpus Christi. So, another student and I, two airplanes, and the instructor in a third airplane, got out there. Of course, Margo and Ryan, they had to stay. But then they were in a good, secure place. But anyway, we went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

I didn't finish my Sioux City story. We were low level, heading to Minneapolis at 500 feet. The Sioux City Airport is down on the opposite side of the Missouri River and, of course, on the other bank. On the other bank of the Missouri is a pretty high cliff and I did not see that airport. We were so low until I was right in their traffic pattern, that I flew right across the airport, a controlled airport, without talking. However, I had just made a VFR position report. (We had to talk, tell them every hour about where we were at.) I made it to Sioux City Radio. The tower came back a minute later and said, "Marine, was that you that flew over our airport?" I figured for sure I'd have a flight violation when I got to Minneapolis, but they let it go.

Then another time earlier, like I was starting another story, we flew into Sioux Falls, South Dakota for the weekend. It was a civilian airport. We walked out to the F9, you know, with our whole flight gear on and a crowd in the terminal, waiting on flight or something. They'd look at us on the way by and then we'd collect those jets and go fly. But we stayed with Gene Kimmel, the instructor's family. He was killed later in

Vietnam. But Tom Brokaw did a documentary on Vietnam and it included him. But him and (I can't think of his name), him and our instructor had been best friends in college at the University of South Dakota. Brokaw was from South Dakota, and of course he showed a picture of his gravesite there in Sioux Falls. I remember his folks lived near downtown Sioux Falls. His dad was an auto mechanic, just real down-to-earth friendly people. Brokaw said that is when he turned against the war.

Cara: Was that common, that you would just get to know people well and then they passed away?

Rick: Yes. As a matter of fact, at Meridian in basic training, flying that little T2, John McCain was an instructor in the same squadron. I never flew with him, and us kids just kind of stayed out of his way because, you know, we were 22 and he was already 30, I think, eight years older. His dad was a top admiral in the Pacific when he was a POW. His granddad was a top admiral in World War One. As a matter of fact, John McCain, Senior, was one of the first naval aviators. The airport there at Meridian, the Naval Air Station, was named McCain Field after his granddad, I guess.

Cara: Yes.

Rick: And John McCain was a real hot shot then. He barely made it through the academy, with all the stunts he pulled. I read his autobiography and he said one day he was coming in to land at Meridian Air Station and the tower told him to go around. He said, "I don't have to. This is my airport." That's the kind of attitude he had, but you know, after his five years plus at Hanoi Hilton... He was a great guy after that. But I never walked up and met him because he wasn't interested in meeting some second lieutenant going through the flight training program, unless he flew with me. Anyway, that's that story.

Cara: I read his book too. It was well-written.

Rick: Yeah, yeah, but you remember? He said that in that book.

Cara: He went on to even greater things.

Rick: This was some of that flying out west, you know, back with the A6. I can't read my writing upside-down but this is Lake Mead and Boulder Dam. Well, it's upside-down but anyway, that's that big crater out there. We just had so much fun and I don't know. Bugs on the windshield. That's how low we were. I noticed the bugs.

Cara: How low do you have to fly to get bugs?

Rick: We were 500 feet, so there's a lot of bugs get up past that, of course, with updrafts. And on a hot day in the desert, you're going to have updrafts. Several times, we flew down through the bottom of the Grand Canyon. It's 5,000 feet deep and then the last 1,000 feet, down to the Colorado River, is a real tight little canyon. We weren't down in there, but we were 3,500 feet below the rim, just flying back and forth, sometimes follow-the-leader type stuff and sometimes by ourselves. It was fun. We had a lot of fun flying that airplane. This was my colonel. He was almost like a father to me. He gave me a huge compliment years later because I kept up with him. As a matter of fact, him and Steve...

Cara: Skipper Ron Townsend.

Rick: But I've got a picture somewhere, us water skiing. But anyway, Sandy Larson and the Skipper came out from California on Southwest about 15 years ago and I picked them up in Oke City. We spent three or four days messing around here and then went back to Albuquerque. My sister Peggy lived there, so we spent the night there and they went home. But he gave me a supreme compliment. Years later, he said, "Rick, you're one of the five pilots that I've ever met," (and he knew a lot of pilots) ... Of course, he was our skipper and he'd flown for 20 years in the service before that. He said, "You're one of five pilots I've ever met that has that kind of natural flying ability."

Boy that that was a huge compliment. But here's our trip over. We flew those A6s to Vietnam. We didn't have enough fuel to make Hawaii from the west coast, so the tankers, the C-130s, met us half-way out there to take on gas. And here we're plugged in getting fuel to get to Hawaii. The best drink I ever had, the Marine gals, the Women Marines anyway, they brought a Mai Tai out to us just as soon as we landed there at Kaneohe Bay in Hawaii, made out of a fresh pineapple. Oh, that was a delicious drink. So that was fun. And then of course we landed at Wake Island for the night.

Cara: Where is Wake Island?

Rick: It's far enough west of Hawaii that we had to take on gas again. Probably 2,000 miles west of Hawaii. There was one little island called Johnston Island, below us, when we were taking on fuel, but they didn't want us to land down there. It was just a little rectangle, pulled up enough to make an airstrip, there at Johnson Island, but it was a nuclear storage facility at the time. And so, we met the 130s again and took on

gas. And then the next stop after Wake was Guam. And the next day was the Philippines. And the next day was Vietnam. Oh, here's Wake and some of the...

Cara: World War II memorial?

Rick: Yes. (Another picture) And that's some of the old Japanese anti-ship guns still rusting down out there. And then in Vietnam one day, the bomb dump blew up. Even though we were a mile away it from it, 30 times during the day there was a huge explosion.

Cara: Here was where was this?

Rick: This is Da Nang. The bomb dump blew up at Da Nang in April of '69.

Cara: Why did it blow up?

Rick: I think they were just burning. At first, they suspected this V.C. in a jeep, and going to the brig, but I think they just decided it was a local Vietnamese burning the edge of the bomb dump and got too deep. But look what it did to our hut! When we were flying, we lived in these nice Dallas huts. Eight guys lived in there, but look what that concussion a mile away to the wall of those.

Cara: You weren't home at the time?

Rick: No, we were out there. As a matter of fact, time to party, near the bunker, because a lot of times 2.75-inch rockets like this thing going up, would come back down and I don't know if I have a picture of that. That blast would stay red until it got up to a couple hundred feet, and then it would start dying out. It left a smoke ring at 1,000 feet for quite a while. The airport was three miles away, but they shut it down that day because of those terrific bomb blasts just tearing so much stuff up. And of course, it went on after dark. There's some after dark pictures. Anyway, it was quite an experience. Here's the A6 loaded again.



Cara: (Mentioning a picture of bombs painted artistically.) Why do you call those Easter Eggs? The bombs?

Rick: Because at Easter, the ordinance people painted it up like Easter Eggs. Happy Easter, Charley, all that kind of stuff.

Cara: I didn't realize it was so mountainous.

Rick: Yes, Vietnam is full of mountains. This F4, in the next outfit over behind revetments, we parked airplanes behind revetments and they were five feet thick with sand. But a rocket went off on one of those F4s, and that's what it did to that revetment that it was aimed at. It was a pretty loud bang, nobody was hurt and then this F4, he got too low. See the damage to the airplane from the trees?

Cara: But he survived it.

Rick: Yeah, yeah, he brought the airplane back.

Cara: The last person I interviewed did F4 airframe repair.

Rick: He would have been working on something like that. We lived in the Dallas huts and had these 55-gallon drums of sand around the things. If the rockets came in, we just continued to sleep because it would have to be a direct hit to get you. And there was one night when a friend was going out. I just took the camera out and put it on a tripod. And that's the plane captain, it was timed so long that it just looked like

lights all around. But one picture, I guess I didn't enclose it, he was spreading the wings because we always folded the wings. It was a Navy airplane, too, and they had to have folded wings to get them on the hanger deck on the carrier. I never flew this off a carrier, but you can see the wings spreading with the navigation lights. But anyway, I don't have that picture. That was the aftermath of one of our drops. There you can see all the craters in Vietnam. Another picture after our drop put up huge dust clouds.

Cara: A7 wreckage near your hanger?

Rick: A Navy A7, carrier-based, got shot up one day. He was probably losing hydraulic fluid and whatever, and he decided he probably couldn't make it out to a carrier, so he was coming to Chu Lai. On the downwind, he lost control of the airplane, hydraulic fluid or whatever. He ejected and his wingman was behind him trying to shoot it down. The Americal Division was just about half a mile south of where we were and the rounds were coming down in the Americal Division and he still didn't get it shot down. It went on around and crashed right on the outside of the bomb dump and right behind our hanger. They had just rebuilt our hanger from another explosion a few months earlier. It was a real fiasco. One night, rockets came in and got an A4 outfit right next to us, so there was quite a bit of damage there. Well, those things had roofs on them before the rocket came in. It did a lot of damage. (Photo) Here we are having a good time.



Cara: Perfectly sober.

Rick: Pretty much. We never got real drunk except one major. He'd shut the bar down at night, at the O Club and then they'd go out to fly. He took his B.M. with him. They didn't come back, just because he was drunk, I think. But oh, I don't know. There was a nice O Club at Chu Lai. It was bamboo, right on the beach, grass thatched roof. I don't remember that, but the Army Sergeant Major was in trouble with the liquor audit. Right at that same time, this club burned to the ground. I always will believe that the sergeant major that ran that club was also involved in a liquor scam or whatever and didn't want the audit to happen. So, it burned down. I think that's what happened. But I don't know that.

Then every once in a while, we'd have a floor show, with some Filipino bunch or maybe even local Vietnamese, singing the songs we loved to hear, like The Animals, "I've got to get out of this place if it's the last thing I ever do." We'd sing along with them. Then of course, this Chu Lai outfit was going to... You know, Nixon was starting to wind things down, and this outfit was headed to Japan. Well, I was the new guy in it, so I got assigned to Quang Tri flying the Bird Dog. I flew it for a couple of months. Of course, I was a taildragger pilot before I went into the military. So that was fun flying too and I never got any holes in the wings or anything.



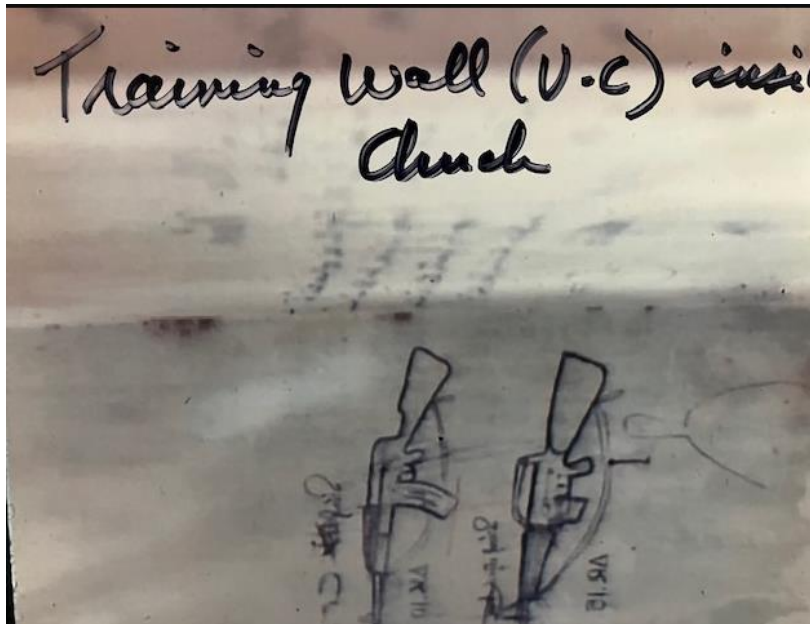
Cara: And it was reusable.

Rick: Barely, it was a pretty junky airplane by that time, but here we're just flying around looking at the craters. We had a few 2.75-inch rockets under the wing of that thing, you can kind of see them there. There was a boat out there. This was a hospital ship. You can see a chopper coming in, bringing a casualty. It was right off the coast of Quang Tri and we were in a camp ground in La Vita, Colorado last summer with family and there was another Kansas plate there. So, I went over to visit with them. This John, I can't think of his last name now, but he was a medic on that ship when I was taking that picture. You know, it's kind of a small world. There's North Vietnam across the river. I can't even remember what it was called now.

Cara: I thought you weren't allowed to go into the demilitarized zone and that was to the north, but you could fly over it?



Rick: Well, on the south half we did, on the south half of the river, but we didn't cross the river. Then we were in North Vietnam. But that was just some of our flying with the Bird Dog. Somewhere here, there's a picture. Well, one day I went out with the doctor to a refugee village. Several of us, just out of boredom, went out to this refugee village and this old church had been a training facility for the Viet Cong. So there were drawings of guns up on the wall.



This guy (I did not know him well, just basically that day) because he didn't fly the Bird Dog. He flew the OV-10. He was passing candy out to the little kids and I don't think I've got a picture. He was flying the OV-10, a twin-engine airplane. They were just taking off from Quang Tri, but I guess he lost an engine on takeoff. He must not have been very familiar with the airplane because he feathered the wrong engine. They went into the top of the hanger and him and his back seater both bled to death from the crash and the tin of the hanger and all that within a few minutes. They bled to death. But anyway, lots of stories.

Here some of us are trying pump water. Those Vietnamese had a basket and there was one person on ropes at each side of that basket and they were just making ... That basket probably held 10 gallons, and they were just pulling water out of that just like that to flood their rice paddies. They were almost as fast as a fairly good pump would pull it up.

And of course, we were on Okinawa taking some FAC (Forward Air Controller) training. And this was along the beach, and as you know, World War II in Okinawa was ferocious. It was horrible. You know, women and kids jumping off the cliff and hiding in caves and all kinds of stuff. And then, it was October of '69 and I had about three months left. Margo and I met in Hawaii for about a week. So that was fun. You know, my experience with war wasn't all that bad.

Cara: Well, let's go back when you were done with boot camp. Where did you go next?

Rick: Pensacola for pre-flight training.

Cara: What is that?

Rick: Well, in shorts and probably barefoot, we had to run in sand traps for maybe two miles. You know, running in sand's not easy. One thing we had to do, besides the indoor training, I don't remember so much of that in Pensacola, but they had an Olympic-sized swimming pool. It was so deep, you couldn't touch the bottom, and we had to pass a swimming test. We had to swim a mile in that pool and you had to turn around and go back the other way without touching the ends. I never was a swimmer and I just did the backstroke. It took me an hour and a half, but I got it. You know, that sort of thing, but I don't remember too much classroom study there. Then we were still at Pensacola. That was just a few weeks and then VT-1 was at Saufley Field out northwest of Pensacola in the little T-34. That's where I got the Student of the Week and Student of the Month. Of course, that's where it was decided which students would get jets and which ones would get choppers. There was only one jet slot open that week and there was 10 marines graduating. I got the jet slot! Otherwise I'd have been in a chopper in Vietnam and that wouldn't have been fun.

Cara: Well, what was your assignment then? When you graduated from Pensacola? What were you called?

Rick: We were still in the early part of flight training because from Pensacola we went up to Meridian, Mississippi and flew the jets for the first time. That was called Basic. Then after that six months, we went back to Pensacola and did our carrier qualifications and also air-to-air gunnery, although the A6 never had guns on it. But we still practiced out over the Gulf. Another T2 would be pulling a banner maybe 1,000 feet behind it, I don't know back ways. We'd be on what they called "The Perch," 2,000 feet up and to the side and we would come in and dive and shoot into that banner. And each airplane had different colored chalk on the rounds, so they could tell who hit it and who didn't. It was hard to hit. And then, of course, that carrier business. What you saw earlier was we went out a week before on the Lexington from Pensacola to watch the class ahead of us. So that's what you were seeing in the picture of the landing. A week later we were doing the same thing.

Cara: How long does it take from when you first get to basic training until you are a fully-fledged fighter? How long does that take for training?

Rick: A year and a half. From Pensacola and carriers, we went to Kingsville, Texas and flew in an F9. It was Korean War vintage. It was getting old by that time and had a strange British-designed engine in it. It wasn't an axial flow like all the jets have now. Now the air comes in and then it's compressed by turbines, then there's the firing

section, and then it leaves that under tremendous heat and speed. And then the turbines behind that run the front turbines. This thing was completely different. It was built-in World War two, developed in England. England developed the first jet. Of course, Germany was developing at the same time. At this end, what did they call that? Radial Flow, maybe, because the burners actually had... The ignition was around the outside of the engine, almost like a radial airplane engine. They were so underpowered. On a 100-degree day at Kingsville, we'd roll most of the runway before those things would get airborne. Then we also made carrier quals there too with the F9.

Cara: Your tour of duty could not have been just two years, then, if they spent a year and a half training you.

Rick: Yes, we were committed to three years after training, so I was two and a half years out when I got back from Vietnam. So, I had another six months at Cherry Point, but then I knew I wanted to get out. Thought maybe I wanted to be an airline pilot at the time, but there was a recession about 1970 so they weren't hiring right then. So, I just bought a spray plane and the rest is history. I got to sleep in my own bed every night and still have a flying career, so it was pretty neat.

Cara: I remember that you had a little helicopter for a while.

Rick: No, I never cared for helicopters. Now the flight instructor at HaviLand, Robert Ellis. His family owned the HaviLand Telephone Company at the time. So, you know, he had some money and he had a little helicopter.

Cara: Maybe that's what we remembered.

Rick: He wanted me to ride with him one day, but I said, "No offence, Robert, that's not my cup of tea. The propeller supposed to be on the front, not on top." So many moving parts on helicopter, and every one of them, I think, is critical to survival. That one big nut at the center of the blades up there, they call it the Jesus Nut. That's how important it is. Helicopters never were my thing.

Cara: You were not involved in combat. You were the one dropping the bombs. How did they assign where you were supposed to drop bombs?

Rick: It came from headquarters, even came from Washington. You know, even when they were flying so hard over North Vietnam, they had to hit specific targets. They, I think they had a surface-to-air missile factory, maybe in Hanoi. I don't remember for sure, but they wouldn't let you bomb something important like that. So, but fortunately, I missed all that part. But I flew the A6 120 missions over there and then I flew that Bird Dog for two months also. I think it was only 20 missions, but then I had a desk job the last four months, which made me happy

Cara: Were you awarded any medal or were you awarded any medals or citations?

Rick: No, just the normal ones. I don't know what it took to earn those, they were called flight medals. I can't remember what they called it. But with 120 missions, I somehow got one medal with the number five on it. It was kind of an award, I guess, but I never got a Bronze Star. My granddaughter, Rebecca, remember her? She joined the Army National Guard out of Hays and a transportation outfit out of high school, probably 15 years ago. She spent two tours in Iraq, two years and three months total, and she came home with a Bronze Star.

I said, "What did you do to earn that Bec?" And she said, "Well, nothing in particular." I think it was a bronze star for meritorious service. Of course, they had another Bronze Star for valor, but I don't think she earned that one.

But I said, "What did you do to earn that?" She said, "Well, as a truck driver, I just went out every time they asked me to." She called it, "Outside the wire." She even volunteered when so many of them would do anything they could to get out of it. She's never talked much about it, so I think she's got some PTSD. She's happily married up in Michigan and so she and her husband will be down here. He came from Wichita, so they'll be down here a couple of weeks, so I'll get to see them. Anyway, she came home with a Bronze Star! And, you know, she never got hurt. But she told me just enough to know that some of her convoy got blown up and this one gal was just hysterical and Bec had to slap her to get her back to reality, that sort of thing. So, she saw a lot that I didn't see.

Cara: Were you ever fired on?

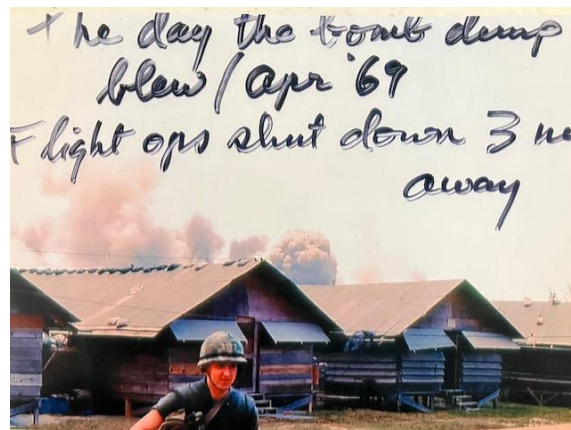
Rick: Oh yeah, no doubt, but we were never hit. I remember one night over in Laos. It was a black night and all, I kind of looked back behind us and the 37 millimeters, the Triple A, every fifth round there is a tracer. There're quite a few rounds, but they were behind us. We were in there with our lights off and preferably in a cloud deck in the middle of the night. So, you know, they were just shooting at sound. Here again, they left their radar guns up north, knowing we'd come back, and we did in '70 and '71. They were just using gun sights and sound, I guess, to shoot at us. I'm sure that close air support, supporting the troops there in Vietnam, I'm sure that small arms were coming up at us, but we were in and out there so quick that... On this wall of that church I showed you, they had an AK47 drawn there and a yardstick secured to the barrel, the end of the barrel. And on that yardstick, they had a helicopter, and a fixed wing, and a jet. Of course, the VC, that's how they aimed at whatever was coming out at them. They had to aim way ahead of it! They put the jet behind this cut. They had to aim way ahead. That's how crude it was.

Cara: And that's how slow the ammunition was.

Rick: Well, it wasn't so much that it was just the different speeds of the different machines they were shooting at.

Cara: What was your life like on the ground? It sounds like you got to go on different trips, sounds like because you were...

Rick: In Vietnam? Well, you know we were always on a secure base in Vietnam, but the rockets would come in, some, and it wasn't completely secure. As a matter of fact, one night, Al Gyore, another dear friend but not as dear as Chuck, anyway, he and I flew together in the middle of the night. This was Tet in '69, just starting, and you know, Tet of '68 was horrible. That night we were taxiing two miles to the other end of the runway, because the wind was out of the north.



We had to go clear down there to take off, about midnight probably. A few rockets came in, and so we just accelerated our checklist and got out of there. A couple of hours later, we left enough fuel to go to Thailand. You know, if there was something big going on. There was a bomb dump blowing up there at Da Nang and nothing else, so it was quiet. Of course, we debriefed and stuck around the squad until daylight thinking, you know, if they needed another flight, if this was another Tet '68 type thing, we'd be glad to take it so somebody else didn't have to get up. But there wasn't, so that was three hours or so. Then we got on the 6by6. Our living quarters were a couple of miles away, and we were through flying for the day. But about the time we got up there another bunch of rockets came in and blew up the bomb dump that was right beside us on the way up... not the bomb dump, but the fuel depot. Then, of course, right where we got on that 6by in front of the hangar a rocket round came down and put a crater in the concrete (or asphalt, whatever that was) about three feet around, four feet around, and a couple of feet deep, right where we'd gotten on that 6by! A little shrapnel came through the ready room too, but nobody was hurt.

We got off the truck and we're drinking a little beer because we didn't have anything to do for the rest of the day except sleep and unwind little. We were behind this bunker that was maybe not as tall as this ceiling, but certainly eight or nine feet tall. We were right behind that bunker and there was a firefight going out there. I don't know, maybe a mile away. It sounded like a bunch of firecrackers going off in unison,

but we were secure right behind that bunker. But Al was standing right beside me and two other guys were there with us too. I don't remember who they were at the time now, but Al was standing right beside me and he went down on his hands and knees. I just thought he'd already had a little too much to drink, but finally he said, "I've been hit."

A round came down over the top of that bunker and we were right close to it. It had to come down not vertically, but almost. It got him right in the throat. Of course, we grabbed hold of him and he could still kind of walk. We got him down the sick bay right quick, and it was just thick dark blood, it wasn't just spurting out of his neck. I was on the flight schedule at the time, so I didn't get out on the hospital ship there in Da Nang harbor to see him. But some of the guys did and he was sitting up in bed writing notes because he couldn't talk. But a day or two later he died. That round must have been infected or something. I don't remember now any more details, but it could have been me just as well. But you know, compared to the grunts out on the field like Gene Allen (our second cousin), nothing, nothing compared.

Cara: What was your daily life like? How much time did you spend in the air? How much time did you spend getting a little rest on the ground.

Rick: I flew 120 missions in six months, with the A6, so it was every other day, I expect, at least. And, up at Quang Tri, 20 missions in the Bird Dog.

Cara: How long is a mission? How many hours?

Rick: Normally with the jet, usually not over two hours and of course with the Bird Dog we'd mess around out there. Sometimes we were watching a convoy go up the trails and supporting if they needed it. But I don't remember that happening. But anyway, so I don't know, maybe 300 hours total. I only ended up with 1,000 hours in the service. I mean you don't build time very fast in those airplanes. The guys in the choppers, you know, they were out several times of day, supporting the troops, a lot of times, every day. So, we had it made in the air.

Cara: How did you stay in touch with your family?



Rick: Normally, just letters. Margo kept all the letters, I guess, I sent home. I've got a stack of them. Someday I might go through them, but I certainly told her about that day when we sitting around the squadron waiting for daylight to take another mission. I've read that letter, but anyway. On the ground we always had collateral jobs, I was writing flight schedule there for quite a while. So, I was busy every day doing that. Of course, they had two of us doing that so if we flew in the daytime somebody else could write it. I always had some kind of collateral job along with the flying.

Cara: When you say 'collateral' that means like a desk job?

Rick: Kind of, writing the flight schedule or being in charge of the para-loft or being an officer over the enlisted troops downstairs, or at least in the States, we were on the second floor of this big hangar. There was an officer downstairs, there was a maintenance officer, there was an ordinance officer, always collateral, but of course the troops did the work. Yeah, and of course they always had a salty old sergeant that you know, us young officers, we paid attention to them because they knew a heck of a lot more about everything than we did as young officers!

Cara: What is a para-loft?

Rick: That's where they pack the parachutes.

Cara: You want to do that right.

Rick: You know, there's a guarantee on those. I guess. If they don't work right, you can bring it back.

Cara: I've had different people describe C Rations and little cans and they didn't say nice things. What kind of foods were you given?

Rick: Well, on a good, secure base, we always had a good mess hall and so we always had good food. You know, not great food, except sometimes like that night that Chuck and Steve went out we had lobster and steak. That was pretty rare, but we had good food. But yeah, one day up at Quang Tri, it was just so sandy up there along the Quang Tri River, whatever it was called, I can't remember and it was just blowing like crazy and they had the mess all shut down, so we had to eat C Rats for a day or two. I don't remember how long. They were edible, of course, but nothing fancy. But the guys on the ground, I think they knew how to spike them up a little bit, somehow.

Cara: Did you have plenty of supplies? Did you always have what you needed to keep the planes in the air?

Rick: With the A6 we did, but that little Bird Dog... They were getting ready to give those to the South Vietnamese and they were just junk. It was a six-cylinder engine and, you know, two plugs in a cylinder. And, once in a while, we'd come back in on five cylinders because both plugs had fallen out on one cylinder. We went back home

and couldn't even get fresh sparkplugs. I even thought about writing Dad, "Send sparkplugs over." But I never did because I probably wouldn't be flying that airplane again that they'd put my new sparkplugs in. It was just that kind of a deal. They were abandoning that Bird Dog outfit before too long. One of those airplanes, the horizontal stabilizer, that thing would move up and down at the end of it a couple or three inches. That's how wore out that thing was. And another time. I was taking off with an A.O. (artillery officer), in the back seat and had just started to take off. You know, Cessnas have a seat that slides back and forth. Well, the front clips on that seat wore out and that seat went over backwards right on his lap. Course, I had my hand on the throttle and it wasn't any big deal. We just started rolling, but that's how junky those things were by the time they gave them to the Vietnamese. That's that story.

Cara: What were your stressors? What kind of pressures were you under? Pressure to perform? Pressure?

Rick: We were anxious to fly. I don't remember even being nervous about the flights. You know your buddies, just like ground officers, or enlisted. At that point, you're not doing it for God and Country, you're doing it for your buddies. And nobody else was backing out of it. So, nobody did. And I enjoyed the flying, even in combat. But, like I said, it would have been a whole different story flying over North Vietnam and we didn't have to do that, so that was fortunate. In 1969, Johnson called that bombing halt, so we didn't have to go north.

Maybe earlier, I said Nixon, but Nixon took office... I don't remember. I always called it Johnson's Bombing Halt, but I think Nixon took office the winter of '69. We hadn't been there very long. I don't remember anyway, we always call it Johnson's Bombing Halt.

Cara: I'm sorry, I don't remember either. Was there anything you did for luck?

Rick: No. I don't remember ever depending on luck. I never went to the chaplain. I'm sure some of the guys did discreetly, but especially maybe Steve, who was apparently really worried at that time, because I don't ever remember him being religious. But we did have a chaplain available. I never went to him and we weren't religious. We didn't go to services. I suppose some of the guys did. I lost one dear friend and two acquaintances in the training command. Bruce Watts, down in Kingsville, was on one of the last flights. Margo and me and him and his wife had gotten in the GTO the weekend before and went into Mexico at Laredo and drove down the Matamoros to come out. I'd never do that today, but back then it was fairly secure. I had just flown with him, I mean, a day or two before that I'd flown a formation flight with Bruce but anyway one day him and his instructor were dog fighting and he just peeled off from 20,000 feet and put it straight in the ground down by Falfurrias, Texas. His wife was a good friend of Margo's. So, Margo went and spent the first night at least with her before the family got there. Becky was her name. So those were experiences we had.

Cara: How did people entertain themselves? It sounds like you like to go on little trips when you had time off.

Rick: In the states, yeah, yeah, and of course there was plenty to do back on the east coast: picnics with friends and...

Rick: What did you do when you went to Vietnam?

Rick: I wished I was home! No, we had these floor shows I showed you. And you know, they kept us busy with our collateral duties too. I never played cards. Some of the guys played poker and stuff and we'd go to the O Club in the evening, if we didn't have to fly that night. You know, we might have a couple Rum and Cokes. I never drank heavy, but I had a lot of fun at the O Club, at night if we didn't have to fly later. So that was our entertainment, I guess. And of course, R&R in Hawaii for a week. That was nice. The military had that set up pretty well. Of course, our wives knew when we were going to be there. So out of Kansas City, because she was living part-time up there with her folks in the Kansas City area, and part of the time in a trailer house out of the farm. But anyway, she got a flight and they all landed in Hawaii maybe a day ahead of us. But they took us in an old DC8 from Vietnam, took us in a bus down to Fort Derussy. It's on Waikiki Beach, along with all the other high-rise hotels. I don't think Fort Derussy was even a high rise, I can't remember. But the wives were all lined up out there by the bus on the sidewalk, you know, waiting for their spouse. And then they took us in for a 15-minute lecture, you know what not to do and what to do and when to be back and all that good stuff. We already had plans to go out on Kawaii for most of the week. We had friends there at the same time. You know, it was a nice social event for us. You know, R&R was a great program for the time. Some of the bachelors went to Australia that sort of thing, but anyway.

Cara: Did you keep a personal diary?

Rick: No. Just those letters I sent home. We communicated almost every day, probably, but I apparently didn't save the letters she sent me, but she saved them and they're all in a little shoe box down in the basement. but Boyd can read them some day if he wants.

Cara: Do you remember the day your service ended?

Rick: That would have been early September of '70 and, you know, I was ready to get out. I wasn't a career Marine for sure, so I had that job skill behind me now. So, like I said, I thought I might go into the airlines, but I don't think I'd have enjoyed that life. They made a lot more money than I did by the time they finished their careers, but a lot of them had their second wife by then and half the time they were in some hotel somewhere and it's not all it's cracked up to be, that airline flying.

Cara: When you finished in Vietnam, did they fly you back to Okinawa before returning to the mainland, or what did you do?

Rick: As a matter of fact, I'd kind of forgotten that. We went by C-130 to Okinawa and then we met the Freedom Bird, DC8. You know, that thing was as long as a cigar and that thing held 265 of us going home. Of course, we all went over the same time, so a lot of our friends were on board the same flight. But it was a junker airplane, even then and it was probably fairly new in the late sixties. I remember my friend next to me. His seat wouldn't recline in that dang thing, so he had to get under that dang thing every time we took off and we had all those people on board, it didn't hold a lot of fuel. I know we landed in Hawaii coming home. Maybe Guam, I don't remember that. But at any rate, we didn't even get off the airplane, they just refueled it. Then another friend close by, water was dripping out of the ceiling of that thing right on his seat. A flight attendant, she came by and put a diaper up there and strapped it up there. A year or two later, a stretch DC8, same podunk airline, I don't remember the name of it, it was just a charter outfit, with just the crew on board, it went down and crashed on the east coast. A screwdriver or something must have got in the controls. I don't know, but that was the airplane we came home in.

Cara: Where did you land in the states?

Rick: Travis Air Force Base, right outside San Francisco, and then we got a ride down to the San Francisco Airport, still in uniform. But, like I said, nobody bothered me. But then, I think it was nonstop Kansas City and that's where the family was, so no big deal.

Cara: So, you didn't have any negative reception when you came back.

Rick: No, I never did. Even in Coldwater, we just didn't talk about it. We just didn't talk about Vietnam. I remember Joe Yost, of course, Mennonite kid, and he had to go to service. He went to Garden City and worked in a hospital, conscientious-objector type stuff. But him and Karen, I remember he gave me a nice compliment, "welcome home" and all that. I suppose others did too, but I just kind of wanted to get it out of my mind. John Deewall asked me to join the V.F.W. I wasn't even interested in the seventies and didn't go to any airshows till back in 1980, I started getting involved. Then it wasn't long after that two things happened.

They built the wall in D.C., a Vietnam Veterans' memorial with more than 58,000 plus names. Margo and the kids and I went back to see it. That was a healing process. Also, it wasn't long after that that Top Gun movie came out. In the seventies, those movies were all "Apocalypse Now" and all that druggy stuff, you know, but Top Gun was different. It was so much like our lives. You know the bases were immaculate and all that good stuff. Of course, I never flew upside-down against an enemy airplane and neither did anybody else. That was all fake. But that started the healing process.

Of course, recently in the last 15 years, I always wear a cap, especially out-of-town, that identifies me as military. So much anymore, that almost every time I'm in Wichita, but there for a while in the last 10 years, it's "Thanks for your service." I'll say, "Thank you for thanking me." So, everything's okay now, but during the seventies it was a little different and some of those guys got treated horrible. Called baby killers and spit on. You know, it wasn't their fault. It was the government's fault to have us there. I always felt like, even though basically we lost that thing, maybe we stopped communism from spreading. You know, Thailand stayed basically democratic and we're friends with Vietnam now. Maybe we did some good. That's what I've always felt and it was a positive experience for me, you can tell from my interview!

Cara: So, you went straight to work. You bought a spray plane. You didn't use the G.I. Bill?

Rick: I did. I went to a crop-dusting school at Greeley, Colorado and used the G.I. Bill for that. A little later, I probably got my instructor license... No, I got my instructor license right quick, but I don't remember some of the details. But I got my instrument instructor license down Slaton, Texas, near Lubbock, Texas, for a two-week deal. I flew the Cub down there and spent two weeks on that. And then I got a twin-engine rating at Yingling, at Cessna, in a Cessna Twin. We had twin engines but they were in the fuselage and it was twin-engine centerline thrust. So, to get another twin-engine, full twin-engine rating, you know, with the engines out on the wings, you had to get a separate license.

Cara: Do they perform so much differently?

Rick: Well, you know, twin engine light planes don't have two engines right in the fuselage. Then I went ahead and got my airline transport pilot license. Never used it, but I got it. So, yeah, I used the G.I. Bill quite a bit.

Cara: You had a couple of friends that were killed on duty. Do you have any other friends that you've continued with?

Rick: Yes, 25 years after Vietnam, 1994, see I was VNA AW225 for 15 months before Vietnam. Then six weeks after we got to Vietnam, I volunteered to leave that squadron and go down to where Chuck was. So, a lot of those guys have squadron reunions. But then there was a bunch that I didn't know at the time because they replaced us at Da Nang. So, 25 years after, Sherry and I had only been married a week, and there was a squadron reunion in Denver, the first one, and I hadn't seen the Skipper in those 25 years or probably not even communicated with him. But I remember, the crowd was all there when we walked in and I guess it was a little bit embarrassing for me, but I went over there and hugged that old boy, I felt... I cared for him that much and of course since then too, but anyway. And then we had reunions every five years. And of course, I knew half the guys well, but I didn't know the other half. We had the last one (and I didn't go to all those because they were all around

different parts of the United States) but the last one was the day of Larry Ellis' funeral, that was 2018. It was in Saint Louis, close enough that we went back there and of course it was fun visiting with some of the guys, but the other guys looked at me like an outsider. So, because, you know, they were in for the whole year with that outfit and I wasn't. They'll probably have more, but I'll never go back. But anyway, that's where we're at on the reunions.

Cara: How many years did you spend as spray pilot?

Rick: Thirty-two, 6,000 hours. I have never bent an airplane, knock on wood. Well, I bent one. I was taxiing back to the house and slowed down to almost nothing at the house and the left main gear came out from under that thing. A tube had rusted and I didn't know it was rusting from the inside. It bent the prop when all that wing came down on the ground, but then of course, with the heavy spruce spars on those old spray planes and the fabric covering, it was sitting there wrinkled for a little bit, but it straightened up! So that's the only airplane I ever bent.

Cara: But it was still flyable. Your military experiences were mostly positive. Did that influence your thinking about the war or about the military in general?

Rick: Once a Marine, Always a Marine. You know I probably raised my kids too rigidly because of my military. My grandmother lived for many years after I came back and one day I was visiting with her in town, where she lived. One day, I said, "Grandma, I don't think I changed over there." She said, "Yes, you did." You know, I didn't realize it, but everybody else did as well. I hadn't been home a couple of nights, we had an almost-new trailer house out at the folks'. Margo stayed there half the time when I was in Vietnam, and the other half in the Kansas City area. But anyway, Ryan was three, almost four by then, and of course his mother probably slept on that side of the bed. He came in the middle of the night and tapped me on the shoulder and I backhanded that poor kid clear into the closet. I felt horrible about it. So I must have had a little bit of nervousness about the whole thing, but that's the only experience. You know, I wasn't on the ground like Gene Allen.

Cara: In retrospect, how do you feel about serving in Vietnam?

Rick: Well, you know I got a lot of good flying experiences. Served my country. You know it was really a fairly enjoyable year for me over there, except family was half a world away.

Cara: Is there anything that you would like people to know about your time in the service that I wasn't smart enough to ask you?

Rick: I don't think of anything. You know, I always have a special appreciation for anybody that served, even the younger ones. I'll try to tell them, "Thanks for your service," especially the World War II people. Even Fran Butcher, she earned a Bronze Star in WWII. She was an R.N. over there in Europe and in a MASH unit not far behind the front lines. You know she saw a lot of gore. But I tried to thank all those

W.W. II guys and girls, "We'd be speaking German or Japanese today it wasn't for you people." I tried to show them a lot of appreciation. Willy Parsons was one of them. There was a whole bunch of those guys and I'd hang out with them some. Virgil Macintyre spent the rest of his life with shrapnel in his body. He had trouble getting on airlines after they started the metal detectors. John Booth and Fred Booth, and so many of them, I sure tried to show my appreciation and kind of hang out with them some, and the Korean people too. Russell Harness, Gene Gates, Speck Zilke, even though he wasn't overseas, and several others. Rich King. You know, he got some disease over there so bad that it about killed him, besides being in the bitter cold. Korea was pure hell too, like World War II, and like Vietnam if you were on the ground. I've got a special place for veterans. I'm so proud of my great-grandmother. She lost two grandsons, my uncle and his cousin.

I wish every 18-year-old had to spend some time, maybe just a year or two (in Israel, they do) in Uncle Sam's service. Not necessarily even learning to carry a rifle, but where they'd have to get up on time every morning. Learn discipline, learn patriotism. I was visiting with a younger guy the other day that is almost middle-aged by now, even he didn't know the history of our combat years. Young people now, they just don't know it at all. They don't even hardly teach such that stuff, I don't think, any more. A kid could learn discipline, patriotism, job skills... there's so much they could learn. But it'll never happen because our congress would never vote something in to send their own kids to that kind of situation. Maybe I should be keeping my mouth shut, but anyway it'll never happen. But I think that would be a positive thing for our nation and the young people in our nation.

Cara: Rick, thank you for your service.



Rick: Thank you for thanking me.

1. LAST NAME-FIRST NAME-MIDDLE NAME BEELY, Richard Isaac		2. GRADE Capt		3. PAY GRADE 03		4. DATE OF BIRTH 05 15 36		5. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER 515 42 4490	
6. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS USMC		7. PLACE OF BIRTH (City and State or Country) Coldwater, Kansas		8. DATE OF BIRTH 19 08 43		9. DATE OF ENTRY INTO CURRENT ACTIVE SERVICE (City and State) None		10. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
11. TYPE OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE Release from Active Duty		12. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED VNA(AW)-224, MAG-14, 2d MAW, MCAS, CPNC		13. DATE OF EFFECTIVE DATE 01 09 70		14. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None		15. REENLISTMENT CODE RE-1	
16. LAST DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND MAJOR COMMAND MCO 1900, LD & CG 2dMAW Ords 7/1326 dtd 20Jul70 SDN 615		17. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER HONORABLE		18. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		19. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		20. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
21. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		22. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		23. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		24. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		25. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
26. SPECIALTY NUMBER & TITLE 7511 Naval Aviator		27. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		28. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		29. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		30. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
31. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		32. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		33. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		34. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		35. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
36. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		37. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		38. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		39. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		40. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
41. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		42. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		43. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		44. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		45. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
46. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		47. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		48. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		49. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		50. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
51. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		52. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		53. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		54. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		55. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
56. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		57. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		58. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		59. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		60. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
61. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		62. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		63. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		64. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		65. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
66. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		67. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		68. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		69. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		70. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
71. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		72. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		73. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		74. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		75. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
76. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		77. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		78. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		79. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		80. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
81. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		82. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		83. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		84. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		85. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
86. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		87. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		88. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		89. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		90. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
91. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		92. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		93. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		94. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		95. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	
96. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Wilmore, Comanche, Kansas		97. GRADE AND TITLE OF OFFICER Pfc E-2		98. DATE OF ENTRY 08 12 71		99. STATE OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED Oklahoma City, Oklahoma		100. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED None	