

John began visiting about his experiences before the audio was set up. So the interview begins mid-sentence.

John: ...They got most of the facts right. But they missed the essence because it's an incommunicable experience. Memoirs are the place to find them. Their memoirs don't tend to be political; they tend to be realistic. I'm talking about guys with lead over their heads.

Cara: I have not read anything by Robert McNamara, and I probably will now.

John: Well, he wrote a book, trying to excuse himself.

Cara: Yes.

John: Yes. He got a lot of us killed for no reason at all.

Cara: What I got from so many people is that the war shouldn't have lasted six months, maybe a year, tops.

John: If they let us go when we went into North Vietnam the first time. Yes. We went to a place about 15 miles north of the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). You know what I mean by the DMZ? Some ammunition dump, a big ammunition dump. And they knew we were coming. There was no [arguing] that. We had guys on that mission from World War Two, Korea, or both, who said, "Never seen flak like that anywhere. They knew we were coming." We only lost six that day. We were shooting them in the toes. We should have gone to Hanoi and shot them between the eyes, if we were going to go to war. Oh, no. They didn't want to upset China, which was totally unprepared for war. They had no nukes. They had no air force. They had no navy. We were worried about China?

Cara: What were they involved in if they weren't prepared?

John: I heard you, but I have no idea what you mean.

Cara: Why did China get involved? What was their motivation?

John: They didn't. We thought they would be. Well, what they had was 1.3 billion. That's Billion with a 'B' people. And they thought, well, in a certain point, quantity becomes quality that they'd come down and invade or protect the people. They were communists see, North Vietnam was communist and they allowed the supplies to come through there and down the Northeast and Northwest Railroad. If you're going to go to war, you'd better be prepared for everybody. When I pulled nuke alert. The United States was funded, funded and equipped to fight the Soviet Union and China at the same time. And we would have done it. They were poorly prepared for a major war. Right now, we aren't and they are getting there. Yes. So, if you're worried about somebody going to... if you're going to do something, don't say, "Well I don't know... We'd better not get them too mad. They might come in and help these North Vietnamese." No, if you can't handle that, you don't go. It was just stupid. Politically stupid.

Cara: Do you believe it was motivated by hope of money? I've heard about Seaboard.

John: No, I don't think it had anything to do with money. I think Kennedy was terribly embarrassed about the Bay of pigs. He was president then and it went horribly. And when it came time to be tough, he started putting troops into Laos and then started the Green Berets. And he was going to show he was a warrior. And he was..

Cara: Okay. This is Cara Vanderree of the Ashland City Library. And today we are interviewing Colonel John Morrissey about his experiences during the Vietnam War. This is funded by Humanities Kansas in conjunctions with the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read project, underwritten by Midwest Arts. Sir, just as a couple questions, you served in the Vietnam War. What branch of service?

John: Air Force.

Cara: And what was your rank when you retired Colonel, and where did you serve?

John: You mean all.

Cara: In all.

John: In Vietnam? Well, I served mostly in Thailand. That's where the air war in North Vietnam was from. Created. I was at Korat and Takhli, the two F-105 bases.

There were two other bases in Thailand: Ubon and Udorn, they were F-4s, and the Nakhon Phanom, we called it The Naked Phantom, but it was on the Mekong River. They were the ones that had the rescue helicopters and aircraft that would go out and look for my mates that were shot down.

Cara: I interviewed a man who worked with the. With the Navy. He was backseat, and they would pick up pilots who had been shot down in the water. Their whole job was to look for, because evidently, they were paying the Vietnamese people to go get them.

John: Well, I'm not quite sure what you mean, because if you got shot down off the shores of North Vietnam, they wanted to get you and put you in jail or kill you. Yes. And we wanted to rescue you!

Cara: So, they tried to pick them up if they had been shot down. But. Okay. You enlisted?

John: No, no. Officers don't enlist.

Cara: What do you do?

John: You volunteered. I was in ROTC, all volunteer.

Cara: Okay.

John: Just a terminology, but...

Cara: But it matters. Where were you raised?

John: Raised in Kansas City area.

Cara: When did you volunteer?

John: Again, I went to KU to be in the Air Force ROTC program. All state-funded schools used to have to do that. All of them.

Cara: Okay.

John: So, it's four years, and you go to classes every year as a freshman and sophomore. And then if you want to continue, then you're in the advanced program and you got paid \$26 a month. And then when you graduated, you received a commission as a second lieutenant.

Then, once you were a second lieutenant, if you were physically qualified, you could see, talk and walk and had a degree, then you went to pilot training. If you were physical, if you didn't, maybe you went to navigator training or some other, like financial or something. In the Air Force, very few people are pilots. Only 3.5% of the Air Force are pilots. The rest are support.

Cara: Okay.

John: Maintenance, payroll, bases, buildings, engineers, stuff like that. Anyway, so. Then in August of 1960, I became a second lieutenant. The pilot training, we were cutting back, I don't know why, on everything. But the Korean War was over. So there weren't many people going in the military. Typical Americans. After World War One, we disbanded. World War two starts, and we didn't have an Air force big enough to be an Arrow Club, or enough troops. Typical Americans. Nothing will happen to us until it does. So anyway, I went to pilot training and it took a year because cadets, the Air Force Academy people, had to go first because they were getting paid full time as soon as they got out.

So I went to Laredo, Texas. I thought, "Great, I'll be glad to get out of here!" Kansas City was too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. Talk about naivete! I went to Laredo, Texas, there were no air conditioners down there! I spent a year in pilot training, and I finished first in class, so I had my choice of assignments. I think it was, let's just say, 38 people in the class, I believe it was 38. And then personnel, one of the jobs, not flying personnel, comes in with all the different types of air aircraft that needed sessions, and there was one F-100 and I wanted to be a fighter pilot worse than anything.

Cara: Why?

John: Because when you grow up in World War Two and you see these fighters flying overhead... and, well, would you rather drive a Ferrari or a 16-Wheeler? And I loved to fly. I mean, if you're going to fly, who wouldn't want to fly those? Oh my God! So I finally got pilot training and I finished first. And I took the F-100

assignment and went to Luke Field in Phoenix. That's where all the F-100 training was done in those days. They had more trainers and F-100's at Luke Field than we had in the entire Pacific and fighters. That took about nine months. And the first day that our squadron went to learn to be fighter pilots, Keith Lukins got up and he said, "I want to mention something to you, why are you here?" And of course, a lot of guys said things. He said, "Yeah, well, that's wonderful, but it's not why you're here. You're here to learn to kill people. You're going to do it with bullets or nuclear weapons. And if it bothers you, then now's the time to take another career field."

Nobody got out of that room because we remembered World War Two, where if we lost, we'd have to learn a new language and we'd have to learn and use a new kind of money, and we wouldn't have much control over that. And I've always believed in the Republic. And I knew that the price of peace is eternal vigilance. I wasn't going to watch from an office desk. So anyway, I got that done in nine months and it was a little rough in those days. I mean, the 100's weren't fully baptized. I remember on two different occasions we lost five in one day before sunup and noon.

Cara: In training?

John: In training, in fighters. One pilot, one seat, one engine. Then I went to Nellis [Air Force Base] and checked out. I got an assignment, which I wanted, to the F-105, the newest and the latest. Incredible airplane. Wow. It was just an unbelievable airplane! So then, my assignment from there was to go to Okinawa to a fighter wing. A wing has three squadrons. I went to 12th Squadron and the squadron has four flights in it, and the flight has about eight people in it. One of the primary jobs there was to sit at nuclear alert 24/7. Yeah, it was the 18th wing and we had 18 on five-minute alert and targets in the center of Shanghai, ICBM sites in Siberia, and people like that, I mean, people in Japan were like that, but they couldn't have nuclear weapons up there by treaty. So, they would go down to their base in Korea and set alert. And they were sitting alert in Thailand and in Italy and in Germany and in England.

Cara: Yes.

John: I think that was about it. I mean, the, the fighters with nukes. At the time, the Soviet Union didn't have anything like that. China didn't have anything like that. The Korean War, they think we fought Koreans, but in the air war over North Korea, way up north, there were four bases in Mongolia, maybe 20 miles across the Elle River or wherever, maybe not that far. The Soviets had at least 500, not at one time, but about 300 at one time. They'd cycle through there to give their pilots some experience in a war. Only about 15 or 20% of those planes were flown by North Koreans. We only

had 186, F-86 there, and our kill ratio of them was about 9 to 1. Nine of them went down for every one of ours. Soviets in the Second World War used airplanes that were an extension of artillery not really air to air combat, but those MiG's were after the B-29s we were using to bomb the airfields in North Korea. And of course, the B-29s were in no position to defend themselves from the MiG's. So we got the F-86's over and put an end to that nonsense.

So I stayed there. And then in January of '65... Well, actually, in December of '64, they took our flight, which was 7 or 8, and then we took six airplanes down to Danang on a day's notice, you're always going to go somewhere on a day's notice or half a day. Our job was to escort the EC. I'll tell you what they were. They're a C-130, so we're going between Haiphong and Hainan Island with intelligence gatherers, voice, communications, linguists. And our job was to be top cover for them.

Well, I shot down every MiG I ever saw, but there weren't any there. A Navy destroyer was down there with radar, and there was nothing going on. So, we went back the next month, at the end of the month, with our squadron. I was sitting on nuclear, so that meant there were six of us from the 12th Squadron. They said, "Okay, 12th Squadron guys, you can go home now and pack. You're deploying with the squadron in the morning, be at the squadron at seven."

They didn't tell us where we were going. We got there and we packed up and went to Danang. There was an F-100 squad there from England Air Force Base, Louisiana. We felt that that something was going to happen, of course. And then one night, about 11:00 or so, we were all at the bar. They said, "You must evacuate. We think there's going to be a mortar and rocket attack. You've got to go to Korat."

We had never heard of Korat. I thought they said Clark; we were going back to Vietnam. Well, it was interesting night flight over there. And when you light that burner, it turns midnight into noon. So, we got there, landed and stayed there, and started flying missions into Laos. Remember, Kennedy, now. We can't keep those bad boys out of the House. And then on the 2nd of March of 1965, Rolling Thunder began. That was the aerial attack on North Vietnam.

Those were the first flights we ever had to go into Vietnam airspace with the Air Force. Actually, the Gulf of Tonkin, maybe a few of them got over the land. But others that were Navy guys, Alvarez, I think, were shot down. They said that there were torpedo boats after the fleet. They didn't get any. But anyway, so that's when the air war first started into North Vietnam.

I was on that, and it was at 2:10 in the afternoon. We lost three people. No, we didn't, we lost three airplanes and all three were rescued. You know, those people in the continent and two of them and one of them had been shot down on his first mission in North Korea. And the other two had been around a while. One of them was on Robbie Reisner's wing. He was an Ace in Korea and flew in World War Two. He eventually had his picture on the cover of Time magazine. Okay, 67th Squadron. My friend Boris

was on his wing, got nailed and the plane, you know, all the warning lights were on. He jumped out and he got about over two hills and they got him out.

So that was the beginning. Rolling Thunder ended in 1968 when Johnson said, "Okay, well, we're not going into the Hanoi area anymore and Rolling Thunder's over," and all of that. All of that. When the war first started, and I'm using January of 1965, there were 495 F-105 D's. That was a single seat, the most current version. The other versions didn't get any more. And by the end of 1968 or early '69. We had only lost 397 of them. In combat. So, planes shot down. Well, three things can happen. Dead right there. Or a parachute doesn't open. You got killed in the cockpit. You got on the ground or died there, or you could be captured or you could be rescued. And there wasn't that many of us. I mean, there were just two bases and each base had maybe, I don't know, at one time they had 75 airplanes and probably 100 pilots. So, in any event, the loss rate was something like this. 50% of the pilots who went over there and flew the 105 were shot down. Just 50%.

And if you were rescued, you went back to the squadron and went at it. I know guys who were shot down three times. And [some shot] once and never came back. So, it was kind of a personal... And then in South Vietnam, the F-100 pilots, they had four bases of them, but they weren't equipped to go to North Vietnam. The speed, they had wet wings, if you hit them in the wing, you know, fire. And it was that was a plane developed in '55 or '56, after Korea. They were using them for close air support. Night and day, sitting alert at night. Going out and find a friendly and giving him a hand. And so, it went and we weren't getting anywhere. They weren't quitting and we weren't winning. But we were playing offense and they were playing defense.

And of course, I won't get too deeply into it, but the men who ended up in the prison camps of Hanoi, it's impossible to give them due credit for the incredible torture that they went through. I mean, they wanted them to write things bad about their country. Very few of them said, "Oh, yeah, I'll do that." But not the stalwart Patriots. Remember Robin Reiser, that I previously mentioned. He was in solitary confinement. He was the ranking [officer] and he was the leader. They weren't allowed to talk to anybody, but you could pass a note. And then finally we got the tap code. And you've heard about that. And by the way, that tap code, the book by Smitty Harris and his wife, that is the story about how the tap code got going. And it's the only book I've read, and I have been aware of a lot of them, that has the wife writing half the book and the husband, and the feelings they had on the same days. Well, anyhow, Robbie, they didn't like the way he was behaving or misbehaving to them. Seventeen months in solitary. Now, I don't mean like, I kind of forget his name. Devil's Island.

Cara: Papillion.

John: They put him in there, over in Europe. They put him in solitary and he'd throw a ball, and there was no light. None. Darkness, maybe a radio station talking about how wonderful communism was. They'd slipped some food under the door. And I think he got out a bit at night, maybe 15 minutes, and then come back in. He still wouldn't talk. Well, that's just some of it. Then there's the physical. And Jeremiah Denton, I think he wrote the book When Hell Was in Session.

Cara: Yes, I read that.

John: And he said, "I had that speaker in my room. And one night, I said, 'God, you have to do something about that speaker.'" And in five minutes it quit. Anyway, I'm getting off subject, I guess, but. Then there was the phony war. We didn't take our airplanes back. We didn't take our troops back. Phony war really started in '69. And nothing was... The Air Force wasn't really going north. They went into Laos. But. I think in 1969, we might have lost eight Model 5's, 8 or 9, instead of, you know, 120 or 30. In '70, we might have lost one in Laos. Laos had no MiG's, missiles, but they had a lot of guns. And then in '71 things started heating up a little bit, but '72, Nixon sent his guy Kissinger to go talk to Chungnam Hai, Mao's guy, to make some arrangement that said, "We're leaving, but we're not running."

So when that arrangement was made, of course, Mao wanted Taiwan, Formosa. That wasn't going to happen, so there was a rather harmless agreement. You know, the Chinese and the Vietnamese are ethnic enemies. So, during Linebacker Two, the second night or it could have been the third, one wave of the B-52s, 100, maybe 33 or 34 of them, exited through southern China. And China did not respond.

Well, you can see them now, the guys looking at their radar scopes in Hanoi, "Oh, this is not good." And of course, Lê Duẩn, who replaced Hồ Chí Minh, was in Paris for the peace talks with Kissinger. There was a cable. We were reading their messages on the wire cable. And I don't know who was running the Politburo then, but he sent a message that said, "You must stop. You must negotiate this quickly or the people will not be with us." And that's what happened. And the Paris Peace Accords were signed January the 23rd of 1973. Linebacker Two, by the way, was 11 days of Christmas, 19 to 29 of December of 1972. All of it went to Hanoi, and some to Haiphong. I remember the first night I was back there; we had a section of us that had to go look for the crews, for B-52s that were shot down. We didn't lose that many, I thought they'd lose more. But the first night, they had 126 B-52s with 120 of the 500 pound bombs going to downtown Hanoi. It would be impossible for anybody to imagine what that would be like. Now there were no off-limit targets except for our P.O.W. camps. Well, it took 11 days. We quit, of course, on April 25, some people say April the 30th.

The north, and there wasn't any north then, but they came down and went unopposed into Saigon because the Democratic House and Senate cut the funding that had been... the United States of America had verified it would work the July before. And so we abrogated on a sacred treaty. And of course, we're still doing it, like Afghan withdrawal. You don't want to trust these politicians. It's all about power, and an eye in the eye. And I don't trust any of them.

But. I got ahead of myself. When I came back from the war, I was sent to the Army Command Staff College, and it's odd, but it was in Fort Leavenworth and the Air Force sent seven a year. Their class was about a thousand, maybe 700. They had over 150 officers from allied nations and the Navy and the Marine Corps. Not a lot, for joint operability. You don't just want the Army acting like the Army. They have to cooperate with the Navy and the Air Force. And that was somewhat lacking. And now, there's about 50 or 60 Air Force people in that school. I thought, oh my God, but I loved it. I mean, I just loved it.

Cara: Why?

John: Because I got to go. I was in section 13, I believe there were... right now I can't remember, there were 47 or 48. All the people in my room, almost all, were young (my age) Army guys that had been shot at, and allied officers from different nations. It was sort of a big picture thing, and it was, I thought, quite exciting. Any way, we stayed there a year, and then you were going to be assigned another assignment, and I was afraid I'd go to the Pentagon. And I was thinking about resigning if I had to go to the Pentagon. Instead, I was asked to stay there and teach the history of air warfare for three years. Wow, that was wonderful. I mean, it was. I remember one of the classes, just as the technique... well, I had British, I had German, I had American... I had our Air Force and I forget, there's one other country that was involved in World War Two. So, I said, we're going to discuss the Battle of Britain and leading up to it. The purpose of the course was, did nations use their monies to properly develop an air force? And what happened to those that did and didn't? I said, "We'll have to use some examples. What's going to happen is, I'm going to show you the movie, the next class, the whole movie, the Hollywood version, but you are going to watch it as if you were one of the people that were there. You will be Churchill. You will be Goering, you will be Hitler, you will be Raider. The German Navy had two German officers there. And you will be, you know, you will be Dowding, that Air Marshal, and all this stuff. And I want you to look at it from their point of view when we get back to the following class." It's like you've died and gone to heaven. You're going to have an opportunity to say, why did you do this? And why didn't that work?

It was amazing the effort that went into it. The Germans, when a German or a Norwegian or a Jap or an Israeli is there, if they want facts for it, they can get it from their country. So essentially and then I'll quit on this, Churchill asked Hitler, "Why

didn't you invade England? He was a German. And you will have to ask Raeder. Raeder was the Chief of the Navy, Raeder said, "Well. It would take us.... We had to get three and a half divisions across the channel in one day to be able to dig in and have any hope of conquering those pesky fighters in Britain. And to do that we would have had to take in all the barges that carried food from the fields, through the canals to the cities to be turned into food. We would never get any of those barges back because it's going to go across the English Channel. You never get any of that back. I mean, ships, yes. Barges. They're not built for that. And of course, then we'd have to wait for a calm day, which almost never happens. And all that stuff that happened to the English years ago."

After he told me that, I thought, well. I think we've got to go against Russia, because that's where the oil and the food was. He forgot to mention that Germany only had about 70 million people. And it wasn't Russia, it was the Soviet Union, and they had over 480 million. Yes. And at a certain point, quantity becomes quality. So, that was very enjoyable. And I thought it was a good way to, you know, get things done. So, I enjoyed that sort of teaching. And it was really amazing. And I learned so much, oh my, about World War One in particular. I always tell people, if you want to understand World War One and why it happened, you've got to read *Dreadnought* by Massey. And the reason for that is, they were going to build this incredible battleship and the taxes that were required. But furthermore, you got to meet every political leader in Europe and discuss it. And then the *Guns of August*, by Barbara Tuchman. I said, you will meet them all there. Then, if you really want to know what happened in the war, read B. H. Liddell Hart . That covers the war, because that'll take you down to the battalion level. You will see how the war was executed by both sides. So anyway, that was fun.

By the way, my friend Chuck Boyd, I just can't say enough. He was shot down twice and captured the second time. The parachute opened about 20ft in the air and he hit the ground hard on the 22nd of April, 1966. He went through it all and then came back and he had not gone to college. He had two years of college so he could be an aviation cadet. So, he got back and had lots of time to reflect in prison. One thing was that fighter pilots are rascals. They're running around with airline stewardesses and everything else. And he was married. So, the wife waited for him and she said, "I waited for you, but there's going to have to be some changes." And Chuck was in bed in San Antonio. I forget the hospital, Brooks, I think. And he said, "I thought about that too. What I would like to do is, I'm going to tell you something. I learned a lot up there and I made some horrible mistakes in life." He told me later, "I made every effort in life to rectify those mistakes, but some of them were irreparable and I will take those to the grave." So anyway. They did renew their vows.

So they said, "Would you like to go back to college and get your degree?" "Yes!" She lived in Oklahoma. He lived in northern Iowa. So, he picked KU because it was halfway. And he went and got a house in the country. He wasn't really wanting to go tell everybody about the war. And she got a job teaching, I think. In any event, after

two years, they said, "You're really doing well. Would you like to get a degree in international relations?" And he did. I'll run on with this, eventually, he got to be a four-star general. And the wife, (while he was a four star, he was the number two man in Europe), she died of cancer, lung cancer. They retired, and then he was the chairman for the group called National Interest, Nixon started it. It had Kissinger in it a Republican that was Speaker of the House. And I forget his name.

Cara: McCain.

John: He became chairman of that, and then he started taking up flying again. We got reacquainted as soon as he came back and. So, he got widowed, and then he ends up marrying Barbara Tuchman's daughter, Jessica. Okay, I got to meet her. I said, "Well, yeah, I used your book.!" I'm not sure this is what you're interested in at all.

Cara: This is all interesting. I do want to hear it. You keep mentioning... When did you say they opened up North Vietnam and allowed you to go in and do your job. When did they allow you to go into North Vietnam and do your job?

John: Well, a lot of the North you're talking about in combat, not visiting after the war. Okay. No, I'm making sure. Okay. Well, at Linebacker Two in March of '65. We were supposed to go in there and it was called a gradual escalation to convince them to be good boys. We all looked at each other and said, "All you're going to do is piss them off, and they're going to fight harder. You should start with Hanoi and work down."

Cara: One of them mentioned that you had 275 jobs, and you started with the least and then went up to the highest?

John: The targets from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. You couldn't pick your own targets. Professionals couldn't pick the targets. You know how to run a war. That's what you know. That's what you go to Fort Leavenworth and stuff for. Oh, no, no, you're just going to... And then, of course, the Russians and the Chinese were sending them thousands of anti-aircraft weapons and munitions. I mean, if we'd have gone up there on March the 2nd, they wouldn't have had anything but a Red Ryder B-B gun and all that. Or is that before your time?

Cara: No, I had one.

John: Anyway, it was just fool's gold. But that's where we were when we went up

there unrestricted, was Linebacker Two. Just 11 days. Worked out pretty well. Yeah, we went down there where they lived.

Cara: And then you came back.

John: And then they got it all backwards. You know, I've got to give Hitler credit when he went in to Russia, he went in with everything he had. He damned near made it, but he forgot winter. And the reason was, he didn't forget winter, but the reason was it was a month late getting started. They're going in there and the Italians were supposed to handle Greece. They couldn't handle a ping pong game. And so now he can't go because the Allies are in there on the flank, you know, not good. So, he had to stop, send four of his divisions down there to maintain law and order. Then he got going in June, which he should have gotten going probably last of April when the ground firmed up, last of April, beginning of May.

And I think he might have made it, but they got 70 miles from Moscow and the weather turned cold. They didn't have any winter clothes. They were Germans. They didn't need that stuff. They were going to be war build. So, they dug in and the Soviets counterattacked, pushed them back about a hundred miles. Could have been 125. Well. As most wars in Europe go, they wait till spring. But then Hitler split his forces into three. Group North was to go to Saint Petersburg. Group Center was to take Moscow, and Group South was to go to Stalingrad. None of the three worked. My take is when they drove them back or when they sent the divisions to Greece, that was probably the tipping point. But once Paulus surrendered the Sixth Army about maybe. 200,000 or 300,000 soldiers, only 17,000 lived through it. Manstein couldn't. He was a goner there. A great general, but he couldn't stop it. The Russians ran out of people in the Battle of Kursk and in Ukraine. Germans thought they had it. This is it. They called up the youngest conscripts. They'd built new, big, powerful tanks. And so, the battle starts and they wanted to flank them and go into the front. So, they sent the tanks out. You know, tanks don't go through ponds like you see in the movies. It's flat ground, it erodes. And so the Soviet tanks started coming over here big time. Boom, boom, boom. But in about five minutes, over 2,500 Soviet tanks came over the hill.

Cara: Yes.

John: Well, then it's just a matter of. Well, you're never going to win.

Cara: You would have thought they would have read through Napoleon.

John: So anyway. Yeah, they forgot Napoleon.

Cara: What is it? You never get into a land war in Asia?

John: Except, yeah, except Napoleon got into Moscow, but there wasn't any food. Yeah, and they burned all the wood, you know. So.

Cara: Well, that brings up another one. If an army fights on its stomach. Did you ever go without?

John: No, of course not.

Cara: So, with all the stuff going on, you always had planes. You always had repairs?

John: Yes.

Cara: You always had support staff?

John: Yeah. Oh, absolutely. Nobody was attacking our bases. We were in Thailand. Okay. And a few times in South Vietnam, they'd have a rocket attack and get a few airplanes. They never occupied any of our bases and South Vietnam.

Cara: Okay. So you never felt want or need, and you always had rockets. You always had ammunition.

John: Everything.

Cara: You had everything you needed.

John: Well, we were running out of air. Oh, and then McNamara canceled the order for the last 800, 105's to buy F-4's, a Navy airplane, because he thought all the services ought to be flying the same airplane for economic reasons and spare parts. Well, you just can't beat that, can you?

Cara: Okay.

John: Anyway.

Cara: Yeah. Okay. How long were you in service? Because you were there at the beginning. How long?

John: How long was it? Was I in the Air Force?

Cara: How long were you in Vietnam? Oh, well.

John: You see, there's that. Let's just put it this way, I flew in the war during parts of '64, '65, '66, '68, '69, '72, and '73.

Cara: Okay.

John: Yeah, it might have been two months or it might have been six months, but it...

Cara: Was part of each year.

John: Not '67. But then the phony war of '70 and '71, I was still in the US Air Force fighter weapons school after I left the 12th Squadron. We always kept a pilot in one of the three airplanes in use, the 105 and 100 of the F-4 in the squadrons. I mean, and if they needed anything, well, we were helpful. That's how I got a lot of my missions. So, I got to see the air war develop. And then being in linebacker too, there was four, maybe five of us at Karot who'd been on the first mission in March 2 of '65. When we were being briefed on it, they said, it's B-52s all night and UA7's then, the 105's were gone. But I spent two years in the A-7 operational test and a valiant squadron.

Cara: Are you comfortable with this?

John: Yeah, and I've been a flight commander. That was over. And I've been a flight commander in an A-7 wing, that was right there in Tucson, where I'd finished the test. I got to be the flight commander in the 354 Squadron. That's not worth writing down, but I said, "Men, I don't know how it's been around here before, but I'm going to get you ready for war. Well, look. Yeah. The Cold War's not over. We're not here to go

out to a gunnery range and come back and go to the bar. We are going to learn how to fight wars."

A wing of A7's were tasked to go back to Karot, not back over to Karot, because peace talks had stalled. But they weren't manned for wartime. This was in September while it was going on, September of '72. But they needed more pilots and we were the only other fighter wing with A7's. So, I volunteered my flight and got to do it. Okay, I had some warriors in my flight and got to do it! I had Tom King who'd had a tour in F-4's and 105's and went to Laos. The was a Raven FAC (Raven Forward Air Controller). Whatever. Nobody knows about those.

Cara: I don't. What is that?

John: They were flying forward air control airplanes to find targets to help General Vang Pao's army. The war in Laos has never been covered very well. But in my five best, there's that book. Yes, if you're interested and I'm not talking down to you at all.

Cara: Oh, no, I got it.

John: But in any event, we got there, and I'm telling you. We did good work. I didn't lose anybody.

Cara: How many missions did you go.

John: You mean for the whole war?

Cara: Well, when you were with the Raven back. What? How many missions did you fly at that time?

John: I didn't I wasn't a Raven FAC. Oh. Forgive me. Yeah. I just said Tom had a background in it, right? But I knew he was a warrior and I didn't need to explain to him anything about war. And Mike Guth had had a year in South Vietnam and F-100's, but the rest of them had not seen war.

Cara: You mean they were young or...

John: Of course, they were young.

Cara: How young? Because I'm thinking 19.

John: Fred Buell was the youngest, and I think he was... I don't know, he'd gone to college. You go to the pilot training at 23, maybe 24. I was born in '39. We're talking '72. I was 33, I guess. Been a major for a while. That's about it, I mean. That's a lot. Well, then, after the Paris Peace Accords. Oh, well. I guess we're all done. No. Cambodia wasn't part of the Paris Peace Accords. So, a lot of the bad guys went to Cambodia to continue their great hope for communism.

By the end of January, after the Peace Paris Peace Accords, we're going to war in Cambodia. Not on the ground, the Cambodians, I mean, the people down there, we were giving them air support. My last mission over that was on June. I don't know, 23rd or 24th of '73. I ended up with about 481 hours of combat time and over about 120 missions into North Vietnam. I mean, you just don't go up there and come right back and be like going from London to Berlin and back. But we were going fast. It took about two hours and 20 minutes.

Cara: Really?

John: Oh, yeah. Cruise speed was about 480 knots. And so about the same distances. A little more maybe.

Cara: How many years did you spend of your total life, sir? In service?

John: I can answer that with some precision, from August of 1961 to June the 30th of 1985, 25 years. I loved it. People were competent and had integrity. First things first. I just thought it was great. I would do it all over again and again and again. No, this nonsense you see anymore. Here.

Cara: So, would you join the modern army?

John: Well, I'm thinking about the question. Well. Now I'm older, so I have to put myself in a mindset of being 19 or so. Well, maybe. I know how it'll start. You know, "Things aren't as good as they used to be." And some of that. Yeah, but maybe they never were. So, I guess compared to what? The Chief of Staff of the Air Force now said in that in two years he does not want white people to be in the majority of officers. I'll think about that. He does not want white officers in the majority. I mean, we've got a 6% of the population is male blacks and of that about maybe 2% are fit for service. No, no, we got to get them in there because, you know, somebody bought

a slave somewhere. I mean, it's just unbelievable. I mean, it's so bad. It kind of reminds me of Robespierre and the French Revolution, 1787. Things got so bad for the people that they didn't care. There were, you know, just a few causing it, but then the guillotine. I said Robespierre, but his name was Augereau. But I think we should let Biden eat cake. That's what he's saying to us. "Let them eat cake." Was not a good statement she made.

Cara: No, and I'm not sure she made it.

John: I'm not sure of anything that's said. But it didn't end well.

Cara: No, but part of that was lack of education and training of any value.

John: Well, that's kind of what's going on now. We don't have education. We have indoctrination. And we do not have the ability to speak freely. Because if you do like Tucker Carlson, you'll be gone.

Cara: Yes, I think he may make more money in the long run than he did before.

John: Well, money's really not going to do.

Cara: I know, but he is reaching a larger audience. How Fox News has lost over half of its viewership.

John: I know that.

Cara: Newsmax is picking it up.

John: Is he going to be on TV or is he just. I saw it in the journal today or yesterday. I read about that, but it didn't come clear to me. Of course. Yeah. What do I know about anything anymore? But it wouldn't be clear to me what kind of role he would have. It's funny, they left Hannity alone. Or maybe they're just going to sequence him out.

Cara: You know, the founder of Fox News just died.

John: Yes. And of course.

Cara: And that may...

John: And I think his wife was speaking for him. And what went on.... I hadn't read the complete issue.

Cara: But that I'm to the point where I don't think I ever get a full... I don't get all the information.

John: Well nobody does.

Cara: So how do you make an informed decision?

John: I think you think about what probably happened in a nonpolitical way. That's hard. For instance, we were shooting them in the toes when all we had to do was, just for a couple of days, go up there. I mean, we all felt that way.

Cara: If you served for 25 years. What age were you when you left the service?

John: Well. Let's see. My birthday's July 31st. And so that was 1985. I think. Okay, let's do this. I was, I think 54.

Cara: Okay. You're still a young man. What did you go to next?

John: Well, I'll tell you what I did. I bought my little Pitt airplane, and I was giving instruction and doing very well in competition. So, I started an aerobatics school, in my own hometown. And about six months later, I raced through it, and people wanted to form an aerobatic team, a four-ship aerobatic team of Pitts. They asked me if I'd be team leader, and I said I would, it would be fun. They were all fighter pilots from the war that knew how to fly formation. You can teach, but that has to come naturally to do this kind of thing. We went on the road for four years. I mean big shows, 24 locations a year. After that, Lou Shattuck, who had been a prisoner of war and could only see in one eye. It didn't do that to him. It was being controlled. And when it went down, the medicine wasn't there. He got out and bought a Pitts, and he enjoyed life and he's another one they sent to college. After only two years, and he graduated summa cum laude from Troy University. And, good pilot. We still get along. He's still alive. I took him and two others and we worked the deck.

Then I talked to Lou and said, "You know, Lou, every year we talk about what almost went wrong. I think we've had enough of this. We were never late for a show. Never had an accident and the pay was pretty good." I said, "I think I'll just go back to teaching aerobatics." I got the idea when I was at Nellis. When I was in the weapons school, I came back to the school (not from the end of the war, but in 1966). I couldn't believe it; I got to go to the weapons school. Jesus Christ. I mean, it's only 13 officers and I don't know how I got selected for them. I'm glad I did. I would fly to Kansas City to see Richard Scarboro and to see the family. I would look down and I see this beautiful grass crossed runway. I mean, wow, and when I got out of the service, I thought that would be a wonderful place.

I found out it was Harold Krier's hometown. Well, he was.... That's the bloodlines of American aerobatics right here. So, I and my wife, Linda, aerobatic pilot, I mean. Well. She was 30 points from being world champion in 1990 in Switzerland. She had a beautiful airplane, French built CAP, that was the initials of the designer, all wooden. So, she let me use her airplane and I flew down. I called Bill Shaw, who was the mayor, and told him my idea. He said, "Well!" I asked him if I could come down and talk about it. "Yeah, come on down." He is a gracious man, Jan and him. And he said, "Yeah, that sounds pretty good. I have an idea. Why don't we just try it and see if it works?"

So, the first year we did it! We tried it and it worked great. Then there was some, I don't know, some kind of a conflict between the people that were at the airport. So after '93, '94, the airport wasn't available for two years. And I said, "Well, really? But if you're in the mood, just call us and we'll come back." We took it to Ephrata, Washington and other places, and then we came back. We came back in '96 or '97. Wait a minute. None. Yeah, I can't remember. Been here ever since. I don't know if I'm coming back, though. I mean, I love it, but at 84? Well.

Cara: You're still a young pup.

John: I kind of feel that way. Well, until all the radiation and this.

Cara: Yes.

John: But no.

Cara: But if it's worth doing, please do it as long as you can.

John: Oh, you don't have to tell me this. On my last day, I want to slide into third base with a big smile on my face. Safely!

Cara: Well, it's more fun when the plane is reusable.

John: Yeah, yeah. Yes. Well, yes. You know, I had to eject once. The engine quit, but that was it. It was north of Nellis. I got hurt a little bit, but not bad. Yeah. Anything I can do to help.

Cara: Just looking back, when you think about serving in Vietnam. How do you feel about your service?

John: Great.

Cara: Okay. You knew you did what you were supposed to do to the best of your ability.

John: Yes, and we were, I mean, all of us, we were World War Two boys. Well, the guys in Korea and Vietnam, and World War Two, we wanted to be like them. I mean, we had a Wing Commander that had been shot down in World War Two, shot down in Korea. He's back. He led from the front, follow me type. You don't get to be around a lot of men. Excuse me? A lot of people. Yes, they were rock stars.

Cara: Stars.

John: Yeah, well, but they didn't act like it. I mean, you don't hear too much. If you hear a fighter pilot talking too much about what he did, you think, unh huh. It bears some scrutiny. We have our reunions, and I'm embarrassed. That used to click on to a most beautiful and and it's off the... that comes on. But none of the other pictures do that. I could get on my. Okay. (This references the Chinook Winds video that available to view on this site.)

Cara: I was looking at the pictures, they are interspersed.

John: But I mean there's more. I can only get this on my iPhone. And I thought, and I felt bad. Oh there, there it's me. Yes, yes, it's Bill Hosmer. Oh, you got the whole thing. Oh, this is wonderful.

Cara: I contacted these people this morning. Yeah. And he is overseas and said he

doesn't have good cell service, but his office staff is going to ask him if I could put this on. You mean.

John: Kade Martin? Oh, Kade Martin's a great guy. And the girl Chase. Kate Chase, she's the one that died of a disease here about two years ago. Oh my golly, it's still alive. Oh, bless that beautiful 105. Oh my God.

I know every one of those guys. I know and have flown with every single one. This is just an incredible sight. I'm so glad you shared it. Oh, and I have asked them if they would let me. It depends on what they have to charge because this is a special level. So let's use my name. I kind of did well, good.

Cara: You shared the link with me.

John: Yes.

Cara: Because this is such an incredible sight.

John: Oh there's... Oh, God. Yeah, look at it.

Cara: Your phone didn't allow you to see the whole thing.

John: No. It's okay, I remember him. That's Ed Scaren who got shot down. Oh, God, he was... He's now is going blind. And I talked to him every day. Yeah. You know. Huh. Oh, this is if you read every word. Especially when Kade Martin writes this little piece. Yes. Uh, he said, you know, the men talk freely. It's just unbelievable. Oh, wait a minute. Put that. You see that guy in the middle? Yes. Are you young enough to remember? Have gun, will, travel. Paladin.

Cara: That's power.

John: No, that's Paladin. I mean, is his dead brother. I mean, a dead ringer for Paladin. And if you go up a little bit, you can see he's got a six shooter. And on his plane, you see on his right side.

Cara: Oh, good grief, you're right. Yes.

John: He put on his plane, "Have gun will travel." And the guy on his left was the guy... That sad story. They were coming back from that mission where we lost six in about two minutes at first. Anyway, his plane was horribly damaged and another guy as well. So, they finally got back into Thailand and one was flipping it and then the controls went. That was the part that was... he jumped out but the chute didn't open. They got the body and they brought it back to Korat. So, there's a C1 41 sitting on the ramp, with the back open and there's Bart in his forever box. They put the box on and Will, a dear friend of his, no wallet, no nothing, gets an American flag and gets up there, puts the flag on Bart's box and lays on top of it. And all their officers said, "You can't do that. Get him out of there." And the wing commander who had been in two wars, said, "He can do whatever he damn-well wants and come back when he wants. Now shut up." Will rode that casket all the way to McConnell Airbase in Wichita.

Cara: And he had to meet the family.

John: I don't know. I think he was just thinking about Bart, and the guy next to him, one of the first guys, that was Bruce Homes. They said we used to look alike and some of them mixed us up together. But he goes back to McConnell teaching people how to fly the 105 as an instructor. He had a house, rented, Jack Redmond with him, the driver. So Bruce and his lady friend was a nurse, and they were at the house and she said, "Well, I've got to go, I'm nursing. Will you drive me?" He said, "My car's out there. Just take it to work. Bring it back." Then he goes down the hall to his bedroom. Jack and his girlfriend come there, and they're not there long, and they see fire coming from down there. They never knew he was there. They got out of the house. The only thing in the morning they saw was his teeth by the door. The fire was there and the windows were barred to keep thieves out. So obviously, those are three men they have to deal with. They were just wonderful guys. And Will just died here about six months ago. Anyway. I'm sorry I got carried away.

Cara: I'm so glad you shared this with me.

John: Tony Kushner just died. I mean, look at that face. It'll tell you all the stories you need to know. That picture right there is us sitting by our shack an hour and a half before we took off to go on the March 10th mission. On the left is Tom Boatman. There's me, there's Charlie Copen, our flight commander, there's Matt Kelch, and up in the door there's a Sam... I can't remember his name. There's Ramos. And then there's Frank Tulo. None of us had been to war, so we weren't fighter pilots yet. We were pilots who flew fighters. But when we came back, we were fighter pilots.

Cara: I don't know if he will allow me to borrow some of his pictures. Because I would put them in with your interview, if you will let me. Sure.

John: Listen. Do anything you want. You do it. And then if they don't like it, say, "I promise never to do it again." I mean, that's how that works.

Cara: I do try to do as people ask me to, but he took fantastic portraits.

John: There's Chuck Boyd, the one I was telling you about, in the Middle.

Cara: Yes. Wow.

Cara: When was this done?

John: Yes, I think I can tell you. It was shown in San Antonio in 2017. If you can read that idea you can understand fighter pilots. We can't talk to anybody else. Oh, look at that. Yes, look at that. Oh. That was the flight line before the first mission into North Vietnam. Oh, God. Those beautiful, beautiful airplanes. They remind me of the 1955 Jaguar Pearls. Somebody knew what they were doing. The designer on that was a Russian. He got out of Russia.

Cara: You know Rick Beeley, he painted that picture.

John: Well, Rick's the one that found that. And I went out there, and I found that headstone, and I took pictures of it. Did I send you some of the pictures?

Cara: You did not, of course I could go. I only live a couple miles from that cemetery.

John: It's hard to find it. I mean, but I talked to Rick, and he taught me how to walk out of the place. He said, go right. Go for what? It's a row. This or this?

Cara: Okay, Larry Dean, I will have to ask about him because I do not know that name.

John: Two wars. That's SS means a silver star with an oak leaf cluster.

Cara: What does that mean?

John: That means he has two silver stars they don't get. They are awarded it. But instead of having you just put a cluster on. That is a big deal. That's the third highest award in Air Force. Then Distinguished Flying Cross and three oak leaf clusters. That means he's got four Distinguished Flying Crosses. Air Medal and 15 oak leaf clusters. That's a big deal.

Cara: How do you earn those?

John: Combat. Only combat.

Cara: And he died of natural causes at home?

John: No, he shot himself.

Cara: Okay, after he got home.

John: Well, not right after he got home. He came back from that war and he went to Nellis, and he was a 105 instructor. Then they sent him to TAC headquarters and we knew when he got shot. Just me. I think he was really good at war. But when he got into the office and the paperwork and dealing with people...

Cara: He wasn't good at peace.

John: And I'm sure there were other things and who knows. But I do know this. He took a shotgun shell for dessert. Okay. Yeah. I don't know if it was a shotgun, but.

Cara: But I'm ashamed because I've lived in Comanche County most of my life and I've never heard of him. And I will have to ask.

John: Rick said he shot himself because of that wife. I mean, she came out here and she was holy hell. Comanche County's dry, and she said, "Well, where's a bar? Where's a liquor store there, Ernie? Well, somebody's got to get me a bottle." In fact, I'd have just get rid of her. She didn't fit in. Well, okay. We had another guy or two

that came back and, you know, he'd done well and was going to move up, but you know what I'm talking about. They all change when they come back.

Cara: Is there anything that you would like to share with the next generation, the young kids that I am helping with this? Is there anything you would like them to understand about your service?

John: No. Just that. It was a great honor. We go to war for our precious blood-earned Republic. You can put it in simpler terms: if you want to learn a new language, if you want to have not a cent of your money left over and not get to vote or do anything, you just keep on doing what you're doing and it'll happen more quickly than you think. The Deep State doesn't want the people to find out what they've been doing, so now they're in the, "Oh my God, we got to protect ourselves." And to do that, we have to get the FBI, the Department of Justice, everybody to get on the same sheet of false music. And I don't know why people don't see that.