



## **The Museum of Flight Oral History Collection**

The Museum of Flight  
Seattle, Washington

### **Roy Church**

**Interviewed by:** John Barth

**Date:** November 16, 2017

**Location:** Seattle, Washington

This interview was made possible with generous support from  
Mary Kay and Michael Hallman

### Abstract:

Vietnam War veteran Roy Church is interviewed about his service with the United States Marine Corps and his careers as a corporate and contract pilot. He discusses his experiences as a Marine aviator during the 1960s, including his time stationed at Da Nang Air Base as a Grumman A-6 bombardier-navigator and his training exercises at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island (Washington). He also shares stories from his time as an air taxi pilot for Chrysler (circa 1970s-1990s) and as an independent contract pilot (1994 to 2008). Topics discussed include his training and service history, notable incidents from his military and civilian careers, his aviation-related hobbies such as gliding and aerobatic biplanes, and his involvement with The Museum of Flight.

### Biography:

Roy Church served with the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam War as a bombardier-navigator and afterwards worked as a corporate and contract pilot for over forty years. He was born in 1944 in Great Falls, Montana. In high school, he was a member of the Marine Corps League Junior Rifle Team, ranking in the top ten of All-American rifle shooters for two years. After graduating from high school, Church was accepted into the Navy ROTC scholarship program and began studying at the University of Michigan. While enrolled, he was a member of the ROTC drill team and the University's rifle team. In July 1964, he was dismissed by the university due to academic performance.

After leaving school, Church took correspondence courses and held a job while trying to gain readmission. In July 1965, he changed paths and joined the Marine Corps Aviation Cadet Training Program. Though he failed the flight physical due to astigmatism, he was able to enroll in naval flight officer training and received training as a bombardier-navigator. He completed his advanced bombardier-navigator training in Sanford, Florida and his Grumman A-6 training at Cherry Point, North Carolina. From there, he was sent to Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in Washington State as part of the West Coast Navy Replacement Air Group. Upon returning to North Carolina in January of 1968, he received his overseas orders for Vietnam.

During his combat tour, Church served at Da Nang Air Base in South Vietnam. He flew 198 missions in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos. He also served for six months as the air group security officer. Church returned to the United States in April 1969 and was honorably discharged as a captain when his enlistment period ended in 1970. Afterwards, he served with the Marine Corps Reserve.

After leaving active duty, Church briefly returned to the University of Michigan and took a job as a part-time security guard for Chrysler. Chrysler offered him a full-time position and, in 1973, sent Church to flight school. From the 1970s to the 1990s, Church worked as one of

Chrysler's air taxi pilots. His passengers included Chrysler executive Lee Iacocca, as well as government officials and rock bands.

Church retired from Chrysler in the 1990s and launched a new career as an independent contract pilot. He also flew for a commercial glider operator while living in Hawaii. After retiring in 2008, he and his wife relocated to Gig Harbor, Washington. He joined The Museum of Flight Docent Corps in 2008.

Church passed away in 2021.

*Biographical information derived from interview and additional information provided by interviewee.*

#### Interviewer:

John Barth is a member of The Museum of Flight Docent Corps, which he joined in 2016. He has over 30 years of experience in the aerospace industry, including manufacturing, supervision and management, and research and development.

#### Restrictions:

Permission to publish material from The Museum of Flight Oral History Program must be obtained from The Museum of Flight Archives.

#### Videography:

Videography by Peder Nelson, TMOF Exhibits Developer.

#### Transcript:

Transcribed by Pioneer Transcription Services. Reviewed by MOF volunteers and staff.

Index:

Introduction and personal background.....	5
First exposure to flight .....	6
College years and joining the Marine Corps .....	6
Service in Vietnam.....	8
Life after leaving active duty and flying corporate jets .....	15
Gliding and aerobatic experiences .....	18
Career as contract pilot.....	19
Involvement with The Museum of Flight.....	21
Parting thoughts and advice for young people .....	22
Training on Whidbey Island .....	24
CBU-20 ‘Rockeye’ ordnance .....	26

## Roy Church

[START OF INTERVIEW]

00:00:00

### *[Introduction and personal background]*

JOHN BARTH: My name is John Barth, and it is 11:45 a.m. on November 16th, 2017. We're located at The Museum of Flight in Tukwila, Washington, and we are here to interview Roy Church. Thank you for taking the time to participate in the Oral History Program.

ROY CHURCH: My pleasure.

JB: Roy, can I get you to state and spell your name?

RC: It's Roy Church, R-O-Y, C-H-U-R-C-H, just like in "cathedral."

JB: Good. Can you give us some background about your family, maybe your grandparents, parents, their occupations?

RC: Not really sure about my father's parents. They came—they were gone pretty much by the time I was born. But my maternal grandparents were homesteaders in Montana. And my father was the only male child in the family of four, and when his father died, he ended up pretty much supporting the family. And then he met this 21-year-old redhead—and by this time, he's 40—when they were working in a government warehouse at the beginning of World War II. And, oh, then he quit the warehouse job and started hauling nitroglycerin while they were building the Alaskan highway. And he used to fly her and one of her buddies up to Edmonton for the weekend. And then in 1943, they got married, and I came along a year later.

JB: So tell us where you were born and what it was like when you grew up there—growing up.

RC: Well, I was—my father and—about the time I was—they got married or shortly thereafter, lost the lower part of his left leg in an industrial accident, so he went to work for the Great Northern Railroad. And for the first six years of my life, we lived in little depots all over Eastern Montana because Dad didn't have any seniority. And then we finally came back to Great Falls, where I was born, and I graduated from Great Falls Public High School. I was 41st in a class of 735.

JB: Any brothers or sisters?

RC: One sister, the Wicked Witch of the West.

JB: What was it like growing up in Great Falls, the part of it you spent there?

RC: Well, you know, I delivered newspapers in the morning, sometimes in minus-56 degrees Fahrenheit. In my junior year of high school, Dad came up to me and he said, “Son, you realize, of course, that I can’t afford to send you to college, so you must get a scholarship.” So I applied to a few places, and our neighbor was the commanding officer of the Naval Reserve unit in Great Falls, and he said, “You know, you should forget about going to the Naval Academy. You can—if you get into Navy ROTC, you have 56 colleges to pick from.” “Oh, really?” So long story short, I applied and was accepted and ended up going to the University of Michigan.

00:04:51

***[First exposure to flight]***

JB: What was your first exposure to flight?

RC: I think one of my uncles who’d been a Marine in World War II bought a little airplane, and he took us all up flying.

JB: How old were you then?

RC: Probably junior high or thereabouts.

JB: That—you enjoyed that?

RC: Oh, of course. You know, a little kid and look up over the windowsill and, “Wow, that’s pretty neat.”

00:05:32

***[College years and joining the Marine Corps]***

JB: So during college, do you participate in sports? Student government? ROTC? What were you in? What did you—

RC: Well, I was a member of the University of Michigan Rifle Team because, when I was growing up in Great Falls, I was a member of the Marine Corps League Junior Rifle Team, and I was in the top ten All-American rifle shooter for two years. Plus all three ROTC units at Michigan had a drill team that I was part of as well.

JB: So did you finish college?

RC: Nope. You know, I had—came out of high school without the best of study habits. If you go to the University of Michigan, where after you get out of the 100-series classes for freshmen, you’re competing with grad students in almost everything else. Plus they

ain't no dummies that come to the University of Michigan, for openers. And it took them two years to get rid of me.

JB: So from there, it was Marines?

RC: Well, not quite. I tried to—this was '64, so the Vietnam War hasn't started winding up yet. So I tried for a year to—taking correspondence courses and working and trying to get back in, and nope. So turns out that the Marine Corps and the Navy in those days still had an Aviation Cadet Program. And as long as you had two years of college or could pass the equivalency exam and the physical and the written test, you could apply.

So I did all that and I got through everything, including the interview, and then he says—this is July '65, by the way—“We don't have any quotas this month.” And I said, “Well, I am 21, a college dropout, and unmarried. And the draft board has assured me that I was not going to last another month.” So a little discussion with the recruiter, and he says, “Well, if you join the Marine Corps as an enlisted man, in about the third week, the drill instructor will say, ‘Anyone want to go fly?’ Raise your hand, and I'll send all of your stuff to San Diego.” Which is what happened. And made it through boot camp and the infantry training regiment and arrived in Pensacola in February '66, I think.

JB: What was your training like?

RC: Well, first of all, you—in the first week, you walk around in zoom bags—you know, old flight suits that one size fits all. And they have Marine Corps drill instructors attached to every company. And so you go—the last thing you do in the week, after you've got the uniforms and you're assigned to a barracks, is you go to the Naval Hospital for the incoming flight physical. And I failed. They found the astigmatism in my left eye, and it was over.

So I spent about three, four months in kind of purgatory, betwixt and between. Well, they finally decided, “Well, we really need naval flight officers, so we'll create this program for you.” And so I was a cadet going through naval flight officer training and eventually ended up—you do basic navigator training in Pensacola, do RL training in Glynco, Georgia. Everybody does in those days. And then you either go to—in those days the EA-6, the A-6 bomber, RA-5C or the F-4. And I knew that Marine RAOs were just audible altimeters because all they were doing was dropping bombs. Well, I can drop bombs in an A-6 and have a much better job, so I elected to go that way.

JB: More training? The A-6?

RC: Well, then we did a couple months of advanced bombardier-navigator training in Sanford, Florida, and then finally I arrived—this is spring of '67—arrived at Cherry Point, North Carolina—which, in those days, there were only three places in the world

you could serve in a Marine A-6, and one was Cherry Point, one was Da Nang Air Base, and Chu Lai Air Base in Vietnam.

So as I come to my squadron, I'm looking at a crispy critter. They'd had—the Marine Corps doesn't have a lot of money for support equipment, and what they do have mostly is considered expeditionary so that it only has to last 90 days. And you get thrown on the beach, and they don't expect it to last forever. So we used to hot refuel, engines running, and they'd plug the hose into the side of the airplane, and you'd sit there with only one—completely unstrapped. Well, the receptacle for the refueling hose is this far back from the right intake [demonstrates]. And the hose split. Got this big vacuum cleaner sitting there a foot away, and it sucked the fuel in and turned it on fire and spit it right back out. And so here our—the canopy going that way [demonstrates], and pilot and bombardier running off the wings, and the poor kid who was running the refueling nozzle running for his life. And that's what I saw as my welcome to Marine aviation.

A week later, we had ground egress training. I am the owner of number one in three different squadrons because I'm not—throughout my entire career, was not going to burn in an airplane.

JB: After your training, what next?

RC: Well, I'm in Cherry Point. And once a quarter, we'd go to Yuma, Arizona, for a couple weeks to drop live ordnance. Well, I came back, and there was a note on the board in the ops office saying, "Go see Major so-and-so at the group." So I went and saw him the next day, and he says, "We have an opening for you in Whidbey Island, Washington, with the West Coast Navy Replacement Air Group." And I said, "Can I take my car?" "Oh, yeah. You're going to be there for six months." So I got to come out here and play with the Navy for six months. At the end of that, I went back to Cherry Point, and they said, "Don't even bother to check back in because you're leaving in a week for Vietnam."

00:15:49

### **[Service in Vietnam]**

JB: So when was that? When did you go to Vietnam?

RC: Well, so this is January of '68. By the time I took some leave—you know, you have to stop by and say goodbye to Mom and Dad and let them know about, you know, the code words for if I ever got shot down that they had to give the rescue folks so that they could authenticate who I was. My mother didn't react very well to that, as you might well imagine.

And so about a week before I'm supposed to show up in San Francisco, I came here to



Seattle because I'd been dating this gal who worked for Ma Bell in downtown Seattle. And so we went up to Whidbey to laugh and giggle with the third musketeer, who was a Navy bombardier.

Well, we ended up in a training group and said, "Well, we have this A-6 we want to transpack sometime in the near future. Would you be interested?" And I said, "Well, if you get my orders changed, sure," thinking, you know, I'd get more time. Day-and-a-half later, phone rings in Seattle. It's on for tomorrow. Not a happy time in Seattle, I can guarantee you. And we—this Navy lieutenant commander and I flew that airplane from Whidbey to Honolulu to Wake Island and on to Cubi Point in the Philippines. And then I took a C-130 into Da Nang Air Base just in time for the first week of the Tet Offensive. And I spent most of the first week-and-a-half in country in a bunker when I wasn't studying the rules of engagement.

JB: What was it like there?

RC: Well, we lived in Southeast Asia huts, which are kind of wooden buildings with screens on the side and a tin roof. And they're not air conditioned. And they were about 200 yards off the side of the runway, so every two minutes, there's a couple F-4s thundering down the runway. So you can imagine how much sleep you got. And in the Navy and the Marine Corps, all officers have a collateral duty. Well, I arrived in Vietnam as a very junior lieutenant, and so I was the SLJO. And if you want to know what that is, that's the "Shitty Little Jobs Officer. [laughter]

JB: [shows photograph off-camera] So is that what's referred to as a hooch?

RC: That's what it is. [points to himself in photograph] That's me.

JB: That's you.

RC: That's me.

JB: That's you and your hooch, huh?

RC: Yep. And, you know, we flew 99% of our missions at night, so the only time that I got to fly during the daytime was either a test flight—did a lot of flying in support of the siege of Khe Sanh. Our ordnance boys were so busy that, if you weren't flying, sometimes we got to hump bombs, also. And the airplane, as you can see, carries 28 500-pound bombs, and it takes six people to put a bomb on the rack. You get your physical fitness training in a hurry.

JB: So you loaded your own bombs?

RC: Not often, but occasionally.

JB: Okay. And so describe dispersing them. Was it kind of like carpet-bombing or did you have specific targets for each one? You got a lot of bombs there.

RC: Yeah. Well, most every mission would start off with the brief for the whole—all the crews at 4:00 in the afternoon, and most of them—90% of the ones that I flew in North Vietnam were road interdiction. And if you were flying with a major, you got to go early in the evening. If you were flying with a lieutenant or a captain, you got to fly after midnight. You ride the truck down to the hangar line and hope that the VC didn't rocket you before you could get off the ground. We'd brief one another. Pilot would preflight the airplane. I'd preflight the bombs. Because you got to have all the wires and bits and pieces in the right spot.

Then you'd take off and go on across the DMZ, turn all the lights off. And we had most of Route Package 1 and a little bit of Route Package 2, where we'd just run the highways. And the radar in the A-6 has this little—neat little feature called “moving target indicator,” where if you're moving more than four miles an hour, you show up as a popcorn ball on the radar scope. Six bombs, two in front, third one in—on the target and three after, and [demonstrates sound] when the computer says it's time—or if the computer failed, which was a fairly common occurrence, you'd just put in a manual range line—and 18,000 feet is the time of flight—or the distance the bombs fly. And we mostly flew at 4,000 feet and as fast as the airplane would go with all that ordnance hung on it. And the bombs would have a four-second delay because the bombs don't just do this [demonstrates], they kind of do this [demonstrates] as you fly along. And at four seconds, you're out of the frag pattern of the bombs, which I'm coming to a story on the second commanding officer I had.

We're still flying in North Vietnam, and the Dancing Bear walks into our all-officer meeting. That's what we called him behind his back. He was about six-four and redheaded and big guy, who told us when he took over, said, “I have flown nothing but a BMD since the Korean War.” BMD is a “Big Metal Desk.” We had a lot of those because the A-6 is a pretty easy airplane to fly. Well, anyway, he walks into the meeting, and he says, “Well, I've been advised by the wing that they have all these radio influence—radio fuses sitting in Okinawa that they want to get rid of. So you avionics boys make sure that the boxes work, and you boys figure out how we're going to do that.”

And I raised my hand, and I said, “Is the colonel aware that 4% of all radio-fused bombs detonate on arm?” “No.” “Well,” I said, “it's a fact. And we carry 28 500-pound bombs on every mission, and I can't speak for the rest of the air crews sitting here, but I for one don't like the odds and I won't haul them.” Well, a week later, I have orders to forward air controller school in Okinawa, and I said, “Hmm, guess he didn't like my opinion.” So I went to the group administrator, and I said, “You know, I really don't want to be a

FAC.” Because FACs, despite what it says in the—do not fly. You’re with the battalion commander on the ground, standing next to this kid with this huge radio so you can talk to the helicopters and the fixed wing. And you’re just a big target, and at least two of my friends who were forward air controllers got to call in their own medevacs.

So for the middle six months, I became the air group security officer. And we had a flight line area where the hooches were, and then our own little bomb dump that had a month’s supply of bombs, rockets, and bullets. And I was in charge of the 130 boys that protected all of that, 30 of whom were really infantry guys who’d gotten too many Purple Hearts to go back out in the field, and the other 100 came from the five squadrons for 60 days at a time. And they don’t send you the brightest and the best. And so I was at office hours with my colonel almost six days out of seven for one or the other of my boys who screwed up.

JB: Sounds like a challenging job.

RC: Yeah. It could be. It was occasionally. Like at one point, we—the 3rd Marine brig ran out of room, so unless you were a rapist or a murderer, you got sent back to your unit. Well, I got three of them back. One was a dishonorable discharge guy and a bad-conduct discharge guy and a kid who got caught with marijuana. [cellphone rings] Shit. Sorry.

So I have them in my drunk tank, which was made out of wire pallets and about six feet off the ground and—because I’m just kind of boarding them till they go away. I let them have their stereos and a blanket or two and some other things—a cot to sleep on. Well, we got rocketed, so I told the—my security guys, “Get them out of the—and get them in a bunker.” “We don’t want to go. The mosquitos will eat us alive.” Said, “Get them out of there and get them in the bunker.” Well, the last guy going by me punched me in the nose. And I have a big nose that’s never been broken, and I was not pleased. And so when the all-clear siren went off, I said, “Put them back in the cage and strip it clean.”

So I go—I think I was supposed to fly later that night—so I went back to my hooch. Well, I’d left my smokes and my lighter on my desk in the security bunker. So I walk back, and here’s the sergeant of the guard and all the off-duty kids, and they all have gas masks on. And he’s got a tear gas grenade that he’s going to throw into this cage. And I said, “Oh, this is not pretty.” Because everyone was a little uptight about gas. We actually had to carry a gas mask around if you’re just floating around—or you were supposed to.

So as I walked in, here are these three agents outside the cage but inside the building—because the cage was inside a small hooch and about this much room [demonstrates] between the walls and the cage. And I said, “What’s—” And I happen to pick up an axe handle as I walked in there. And I said, “What’s going on?” “Well,” he said, “we’re not going back in that cage because the mosquitos will eat us alive.” And I said, “I’ll give

you a blanket.” “Okay.” So the two guys who were going to be discharged, they start heading for the door. Well, Mister All-American—he’s got shoulders bigger than mine—and he’s got a two-by-four in his hand, and he’s losing it. “I’m not going back in there. You can’t make me.”

Well, he’s about from me to you, and I said, “You know, this is just going to get uglier.” So I speared him in the sternum with the axe handle, whereupon he fell on top of me, and the next thing I know is there are about 20 hands pulling me out from underneath him. And all three of them got to go to the flight surgeons the next morning for X-rays, followed shortly thereafter by all three of them being trucked up to the brig. And the brig has three levels of incarceration. In the first one, you’re in a Southeast Asia hut just like everyone else. Then they had some concrete boxes that were, oh, maybe four feet by eight feet that had a blanket, a pail, and a Bible. And if you were a real bad actor, you got thrown in the Conex boxes—you know, the steel shipping containers. And all three of them got the Conex boxes. Because my gunny knew the sergeant major up there, and he wasn’t going to put up with any of that stuff anymore. Then I went back to the squadron for my last two months.

JB: So you’re flying again. Or it sounds like you were flying all the time.

RC: Yeah, I was. Not as much as I had been, but, you know, the squadron said, “You have to fly.” And I said, “Bad things happen at night.” “Well, you’re still going to have to fly.” So I mostly flew in the late morning just before the sun came up, which caused a little bit of problems because I had a report to furnish to the group every morning. And my corporal used to—who could barely type—used to punch it out and sign my name to it, and I just lived—dreaded seeing any of those things after he did it.

JB: So for the next two months, you’re flying?

RC: I’m flying. Mostly with new guys because I’m an old guy now. Because that’s how we did it. The Marine Corps, unlike the Navy, didn’t make a crew that stayed together. You never knew until you walked into the brief who you were flying with that night. So, you know, I’m—twice in my career, I’ve had my hands on the face curtain getting ready to punch out, and one of them was with—during this period. We’d got this kid from—well, he wasn’t a kid. He was the same age I am—was. But he’d been an A-4 pilot, and in an A-4, in order to take off, you have to pick the nose up. Well, in an A-6, you trim a certain amount of trim for the weight and the temperature, and it flies off. Well, I kept telling him, “You know, Steve, you can’t do that. You can’t pull the nose up. We’re going to crash.” Well, one night he did it, and I left my pencil in midair because he dropped the wing. And we’re at about 20, 30 feet above the runway, and fortunately enough, the airplane accelerated enough that we plucked ourselves out of the weeds. And I say—yeah, big sigh of relief there.

Well, a couple weeks later, I'm over in Laos—because we took this valley over in Laos and turned it into the craters of the Moon because we had nothing else to do. But this night, we're over with—I'm over with a guy I'd never flown with before. And we're running in the valleys, and it's pitch black, no stars, no Moon. And he said, "Roy, how much longer do we have to do this?" And I said, "All five stations are selected, and the master arms on. And I'll put 28 impulses on, and all you have to do is hit that red button, and we can go home." And he said, "Well, I'd really like to do that because I've been flying upside-down since we left Da Nang." And I said, "What?" He said, "I've been flying—my head tells me I'm flying upside-down." He had vertigo so bad that he was—according to what his ears told him, he was upside-down. And the only thing that saved us is he was a superb instrument pilot and he believed them. And I said, "When we get back to Da Nang, we have to talk."

So normally when we landed, after we refueled the airplane and parked it in the revetments, we'd walk in and debrief a little bit with the operations duty officer. And they always had a six-pack of cold beer. Well, you've been sitting here breathing 100% oxygen for a couple hours, and a nice beer went well. I said, "Frank, this is a crewed airplane. You owe it to the guy you're flying with to tell him that you have a problem." He said, "Yeah." And I said, "I know that you don't want to fess up to the flight surgeons because you're going to end up as a forward air controller," which is what happened to all the ne'er-do-wells, "but you owe it—" It's just like the one-drink-with-dinner rule. You know, we did all of our flying—most of our flying at night, and the ops-o said, "Gentlemen, you're all adults and I'm not going to tell you you can't drink before you fly, but let's keep it to one with dinner."

JB: I've got a couple photos here—

RC: Yeah.

JB: —with X's on them. Can you explain those?

RC: Oh, sure. In my 13 months in Da Nang—the one where we're showing the burnt—[points to photograph]—the crispy critter, was one night the VC rocketed our flight line, and they got two airplanes. And airplanes always sat there in the revetments with—full of fuel and full of bombs.

[points to different photograph] That's me as the security officer. Because most of the—my boys were aviation mechanics, and they hadn't fired a rifle or anything else since they went through boot camp. So in the first week, we'd go out south of Da Nang to a little rifle range and bang away. And I always kept a grenade for me and a couple of belts of machine gun ammo so I could play Rambo. In the other one [photograph], I think I'm—I'm getting my Distinguished Flying Cross.

- JB: Oh. [hands out another photograph]
- RC: Yeah, and that's the same—
- JB: Same aircraft.
- RC: Same—well, one of the two.
- JB: Okay. Oh, all right. And again. [hands out another photograph].
- RC: Well, that's one of the group commanders pinning my DFC on.
- JB: So when did you end up your tour in Vietnam?
- RC: April of '69. Back to wonderful Cheerless Point, North Carolina. [laughter]
- JB: And then what?
- RC: Well, you know, I got there in April, and my enlistment is up the following February. Well, I'd already been reaccepted to the University of Michigan. Well, a few months after I came back, the CO says, "Well, you know, we really would like you to stay in the Marine Corps." And I said, "Well, I have semi-entertained doing that, but I want—I don't want to be the SLJO anymore." "Well, we don't know." Said, "If you send me to aviation safety school, I'll re-up." "Well, you can't go to aviation safety school. It's for pilots only." And I said, "No, it's not. I've read the requirements, and I can go." "Well, no. We'll send you to aviation maintenance school." And I said, "I don't want to go to aviation maintenance school." "Well, I know that you carrier-qualified when you were at Whidbey Island with the Navy. Would you entertain giving up your two years at home to being transferred to our sister squadron hangar," who were going be the first Marine squadron back aboard a Navy carrier. And I said, "Colonel, I've flown with all the majors in that squadron, and I'm not flying off the carrier with any of them." "Oh. Okay." So that ended that, and I—February came, and I packed up my little Z28 Camaro and headed for Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- JB: How many missions did you fly in Vietnam?
- RC: 198, 105 in North Vietnam and the rest of them in South Vietnam and Laos.
- JB: I read a book called *Flying—Flight of the Intruder*.
- RC: Yeah. I'm Tiger Cole, who's the—Jake Grafton's bombardier in the book.
- JB: Is that a pretty realistic book on what Vietnam was like?
- RC: I tell people that if you want to know what I did in the war, this is the book to read.

00:46:45

*[Life after leaving active duty and flying corporate jets]*

JB: What's after the Marines?

RC: Hmm?

JB: What's after the Marines? February came. What's next for you?

RC: Well, I went back to school, joined the Reserves because you got four days of pay for two days a month. And became the admin officer for a while and then later on the ordnance officer in the OV-10 [North American Rockwell OV-10 Bronco] squadron that we had.

And we—the last summer camp we had, the Marine Corps didn't have any money to send us any further away from Detroit than Alpena, Michigan, which is a big National Guard summer camp base. So we arrive with our five greasy green airplanes, along with the Guard from Connecticut and Kentucky, and this master gunnery sergeant walks up to me and he says, "You may not remember me from Da Nang, but I was in the ordnance crew in Marine All-Weather Squadron 242." Said, "Yeah, you look familiar." And he said, "Well, I'm here to find out what you guys do right because you're the only squadron in all of the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing that's never had an ordnance accident." And I said, "Well, we do that because I have a really good bunch of guys, and I keep my eye on them as well." And we survived the summer camp without having a problem. Again.

JB: So...

RC: So I have one semester to get myself off academic pro [probation]. Took a 3.0 grade point average to do that. Well, I got 2.7. "You ain't good enough, Mr. Church. Goodbye." Well, while I was going to school, I was also a security guard at the Chrysler hangar, which was in the next town over. And so they had an opportunity for me to go to work for them. So I ran the stockroom for a while, and then I became the dispatcher for a while. And then finally in '73, they sent me to school, and I started flying their turboprop. And that started my 40-year career of flying corporate jets.

JB: Tell us about that. What was it like?

RC: Well, it's—unlike some of the folks in Detroit, namely GM and Ford, who knew a year ahead of time when they were going to fly, our boss never was that nice. So you come in in the morning—we also had Shitty Little Officer Jobs. Mine was to keep the goodie cabinet in the kitchen supplied with peanuts and popcorn, booze, and beer, plus buy the newspapers and magazines for the airplanes. Which is how I came to own 33 cases of

books, because the gal who ran the bookstore that I used to buy the newspapers and magazines from said, “What are you reading, Roy?” “Oh, you know...” “Well, pick something.” “Okay.” “Well, you know, if you don’t screw it up, just bring it back.” “Oh, okay.”

Well, I bought a lot of them, 33 cases worth, because you—mostly we—in the early days, we were based at Willow Run Airport in Detroit, but we picked up our passengers in either Detroit City or in Pontiac, Michigan. So it was a great thing for the copilots because we got a ten-minute flight, takeoff, and landing in the morning and a ten-minute flight, takeoff and landing in the afternoon. And then we’d go fly to wherever, mostly sit on our derrieres. Summertime, we might occasionally drag our golf clubs along and play a little golf. Or read, obviously. But, you know, it was the same bunch of folks, so you get to know—everyone knows you and you know everyone, and with one exception, they all were pretty nice, upright folks who—you’re in charge.

JB: So when did Chrysler become an air taxi service?

RC: Well, you know, we were kind of in a little bit of—the whole company was in a little trouble in the mid-70s because no one would buy a Chrysler car or a Dodge truck. Or even if they did—let’s see. Yeah, that was during the first oil crunch. We went from selling 2,000 Dodge truck chassis to Winnebago every month to selling two in ‘73. Later on, when you couldn’t buy a Dodge Omni or Plymouth Horizon to save your soul—because they—as soon as the truck stopped they were gone—and then *Consumer Reports* said they were unsafe at any speed and couldn’t sell one of those either. So I got a bunch of them as my lease cars, which was fine.

Anyway, we started—and as I told you earlier, we did a lot of rock tours because in the summertime, when the assembly plants are doing model changeover, everyone goes on vacation, so our flying wouldn’t be at the same level as it would be during the rest of the nine months of the year. And one of the god-awful things about flying rock tours is it’s six different cities every week. And you get to the point in the second week—in the olden days, you used to get a key with a tag on it with your room number. Well, by the second week, it’s not only do I need to know what room I’m in, I can’t even remember what hotel I’m in.

Later on—the last rock tour I did in ‘92 or ‘93 was with Dire Straits, and they did hub-and-spoke. We picked them up in San Francisco, and that whole week we just flew out from San Francisco. And so we were in the same hotel room every—that whole week. It was wonderful, and we did the whole rock tour that way.

But coming home, you know, you hear stories about what goes on in the airplanes. Well, we’ve only just met these guys two hours before—three hours before, and we’d flown them out to Sacramento or Fresno. And we’re coming back, and—[sniffs the air]—I can



smell the marijuana. So I said, “Jerry, ding up Bridget.” Bridget, our flight attendant, comes up. Said, “Bridget, get Rodney, the road manager, up here now.” So Rodney comes up, and he said—[I] said, “You know, it’s not really cool to be flying with high pilots. The outflow valves are right behind Jerry, the copilot, and if you—” And I said, “I will not put up with drugs on the airplane. I don’t care what you do in the limo, care what you do in the hotel room or at the gig, but there will be no drugs on the airplane.”

“Well,” he said, “it’s none of us. It’s the studio musicians that we picked up in L.A.” And I said, “I don’t care who it is.” Because I know it’s an English band, and they’re here on work permits. And, you know, this is ‘92, and every day that they’re on the road it’s \$85,000 of overhead to take care of the band, the roadies, the six trucks, the six buses, and us and the airplane. They’re not going to do anything to jeopardize their being able to earn that kind of money. And I’ve been at the gig three-quarters of the way through the concert, which is when the road manager gets paid in cash. It’s a big pile. It would cover this whole table.

JB: So then Chrysler takes an upturn?

RC: Oh, we did. And, you know, one of the stories I like to tell is Bill Cosby—whether you agree with what’s going on currently—back in the 80s and 70s was a very popular comedian. And he had done ads for Iacocca [Lido A. “Lee” Iacocca] when Iacocca was at Ford. And he calls up the boss—I flew Iacocca for 14 years, his first flight and his last, one as a copilot, one as a captain—and calling the boss was as up close and personal as I ever got. Anyway, says, “I will give a free concert in Detroit for any Chrysler employee who wants to come.” So they rented the Joe Louis Arena, which is the big hockey arena in Detroit, and you walk in, show your ID card, and sit down.

Well, they had the mayor, the senators, the reps, the governor, all get up and blah, blah, blah, blah. And finally the governor introduces Iacocca, who’s going to introduce Bill. And I’m sitting in the middle with my wife—of the hockey rink. And there’s a family of four in front of us, and then a Polish person sitting in front of them wearing three different kinds of plaid and a porkpie hat. And Lido walks out onto the stage, and everybody in the whole place except the two Polish people stood up to give him a standing ovation. And the gal in the family in front of us stood there and tapped the folks in front of her on the shoulder—and not nicely either—and said, “Get on your feet. That’s Lee Iacocca up there.” That’s how much we came back.

And then in—this is early ‘84. A little later that spring—the other story I love to tell was we—Uncle Sam did not lend Chrysler any money in 1980. What they did do was guarantee all the loans. Plus they had their own auditors at our house and charged us \$600,000 a month and made us sell all the airplanes. So anyway, we’re buying airplanes back, and we’re going to—I took Iacocca into Washington, D.C. to do the symbolic

hand-the-check-over to end the whole razzmatazz. Well, I always used to meet the boss at the curb because limos weren't allowed to drive onto the ramp at Washington National. So he gets out of the car, and he's—he used to smoke these foot-long, really expensive, really foul-smelling cigars. And I said, "Well, boss, how'd it go?" And he said, "I don't care if I ever show my face in this town ever again." That's the cleaned-up version. It's the only time I heard him swear in 14 years.

And we marched through the FBO with that cigar getting a half an inch shorter with each puff, across the ramp, up the air-stair door into the airplane. He turns right. I turn left, start up the engines. And we're taxiing out to take off, and the flight attendant comes running up. And it's supposed to be a sterile cockpit, by the way. And she said, "He's still smoking his cigar." And I said, "Yeah. We know that. We can smell it up here." And I said, "You can ask him to put it out, and he will. But, you know, how much do you really like working here?" Because it does—excuse me—occasionally roll downhill that you said or did something untoward, but it takes three to four weeks.

01:04:55

***[Gliding and aerobatic experiences]***

JB: So while you were at Chrysler—

RC: Hmm?

JB: While you were at Chrysler, you took on a couple—you started gliding.

RC: I did. In '92, we had new car—or not new car—new truck previews for the press out in Nevada. And it was the first year of the new Ram pickup trucks. And we were supposed to fly into Baron von Hilton's ranch because that's where they were doing the event. But chief pilot wouldn't let me go there, so I went to Minden, which is about 50 miles away. And there were all these gliders laying around. We're going to be there for three days, and I said, "I've never been in a glider before in my life. This looks like it ought to be the place to do it." So I walk into one of the two commercial operators, and he said, "Oh, yeah. My son will take you up."

So off we go, and we—even though it was August, we got into the mountain wave, which Minden is famous for. And here we are at 17,000 feet in the express elevator going up. And I'm pushing as far forward as I can, and it's still going up. And I said, "You know, we only can go 500 more feet, and we're going to be illegal." And he said, "No, just pull the speed brakes out and we'll go down." And so we did. Then I went back a month later and got my license on vacation.

JB: What about your aerobatic biplane? When did you build that?

RC: Oh, well, you know, we'd been to all these air shows in the '70s and started going to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to the Experimental Aircraft Convention. And there was this guy building this wonderful aerobatic biplane called the Christen Eagle. And it came in 23 big boxes that were so complete they even put a razor blade so you could cut out the vacuum-packed stuff on the lid of the box. And it all had a loose-leaf binder for that kit.

So my first wife and I were making good money and putting a third of it away, and I said, "Well, you know, I'd kind of like to buy a toy airplane." "Well, I'm not going to give you \$85,000 to go buy a Pitts. You buy it as a kit and you build it and then we'll..." So in '82, I walked in after I sold my Plymouth Superbird and bought the two wing kits for the airplane and finished it six years later, almost to the day, in '88. And I still own it.

JB: Did you ever take it back to Oshkosh?

RC: Oh, I made the trip three times. And the first time, I got into the finals for craftsmanship.

JB: That's quite an achievement in itself.

RC: Ah, yeah.

JB: When did you retire from Chrysler?

RC: Oh, in '94. There was new management in the flight department, and they didn't like me very much because I was one of the old guys. And I didn't like them very much either, so they said, "We're going to make you an offer you can't refuse." And I said, "Put a smile on my face." And so I didn't actually retire until five years later, but—officially—but that started my second flying career as a contract pilot.

01:09:45

***[Career as contract pilot]***

JB: Tell us about that.

RC: Well, you know, phone rings, and the guy who owns the airplane says, "I need somebody to fly my airplane from A to B." And I said, "Well, my fee is," and "Yes, I'm available," and "I only travel first-class to get there." "Okay, fine." "And the clock starts when I walk out the door of my house." So—and at the end, I was making \$1,000 a day. But the other thing is that all the training costs—annual training costs, because the FAA isn't that stringent but the insurance companies are—comes out of my pocket. And when I was flying Gulfstream IVs, the annual training costs were \$25,000, plus the travel costs to go to Savannah, Georgia, for a couple of weeks.

JB: So not quite as lucrative as it originally sounded.

RC: No.

JB: You had to—

RC: Well, I made pretty good money. I did a gig—a couple of gigs for the Sultan of Brunei, where I came back and bought \$33,000 worth of sails for my sailboat, a new mast, and essentially spent about \$60,000 out of the one contract.

JB: Tell us about flying for the Sultan.

RC: Well, in those days, the Sultan of Brunei was the most—the wealthiest man in the world. And he had four Gulfstream IVs, a 747-400, a 767-300, half a dozen helicopters—just for the royal family. And, you know, the boys who flew him made really good money, and they got a month off every year to go on holiday. And half of them were English or Scottish. And so I would arrive and just couldn't spend any money. Plus, you know, they had embraced Islam, so there was one bar in the whole country, and at 5:00 in the afternoon when we all got off work, you'd see everybody walking in, peeling off their epaulets, and putting our radio on the bar. Because even though all of us had cellphones, you had to carry this radio 24-7, and they expected you to answer it in 20 seconds or less.

Well, I hardly ever flew when I was flying the Sultan's own G-IV because he'd come out Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturday mornings in a helicopter to the hangar and he'd go—well, I'm exaggerating, but, “Eenie, meenie, minie,” dah, dah, dah, dah, [demonstrates], and most of the time, he'd go fly in the 747. But we had to have all three airplanes sitting there cooled off, ready to go. And that kind of was—about every week-and-a-half or so, we'd just go fly for an hour-and-a-half just to exercise the airplane. Go fly over to Malaysia and make approaches to a different airport and fly home.

JB: So contract flying like that, how long did you do that then?

RC: Well, till—

JB: After you retired with your—

RC: Well, '94 through 2008.

JB: So wasn't part of that in Hawaii?

RC: Well, it was. My wife, who is a big-time—was a big-time sales executive in TV and radio, got transferred to Honolulu to be the general sales manager for two TV stations there. And I never liked Hawaii from the first time I was there on my way to Vietnam. And I really didn't like living there because you're a haole from the day you walk off the airplane till the day you leave, and they make no bones about it. And it's not a very inexpensive place to live either. I mean, my wife drug me to this open house, and this

beautiful house on a 50-foot-by-100-foot lot, no garage—not many doors, for that matter—two-bedroom house, \$1.15 million, and we’ll entertain offers on Tuesday.

JB: But you continued flying while you were there?

RC: Oh, yeah. I flew for a commercial glider operator for four days a week, 852 tourist rides. Some ten minutes, some three hours, most of them just 20 minutes because it wasn’t very cheap.

JB: Of all the planes that you have flown, where do you rate the glider?

RC: It’s right up there, right up—right behind the Falcon 10.

JB: So it sounds like in 2008, you actually did retire.

RC: More or less. The phone stopped ringing. You know, I’m now over 70, and you can’t fly in Europe anymore if you’re above 65 unless your copilot’s less than 60. And that doesn’t compute with a lot of folks.

01:17:27

***[Involvement with The Museum of Flight]***

JB: When did you get started with The Museum of Flight?

RC: Well, when my wife and I got off the airplane at Sea-Tac, we spent two weeks, 2,600 miles, in a rent-a-car looking for a place to live on Puget Sound. And we ended up in Gig Harbor because it, as she said, “This looks just like Northville,” which is the little town that I lived in—for 28 years just outside of Detroit, “only it’s got a harbor.” And we happened to—because I was looking for a glider operator, we went to the Northwest Aero Exposition at Puyallup, and there’s Ted Huetter looking for volunteers for the Museum. And I said, “Here I am.” So a couple weeks later, I met Carol Thomson, and here I am.

JB: So you’re really active here. You’re on quite a few committees. You’re part of this Vietnam project. Can you tell us about your involvement here?

RC: Well, you know, I went through all the same training that every docent does. And at one point in time about four years ago, the—Ken Smith, who had been our Docent Leadership Council rep, said, “My dad’s getting a little creaky, and I got to spend some time in California. Would you take over?” So I am the Thursday afternoon docent rep to the Docent Leadership Council, plus sort of a member of the Exhibits Committee and now a part of the Vietnam Exhibit Committee as well.

JB: What do you like about the Museum?

RC: Well—

JB: How would you rate it?

RC: How would I rate it?

JB: Yeah, as museums go.

RC: Well, it's been decades since I've been to anything—well, the Smithsonian or the Air Force Museum. But it's better than San Diego, either one, and better than New York. And I've enjoyed my tenure here.

01:20:24

*[Parting thoughts and advice for young people]*

JB: Do you have any topics that we missed, anything we didn't talk about? I mean, I—

RC: No.

JB: ...just kind of slid over the top of your careers, but nothing we missed?

RC: Well, you know, it—what—when you fly the same people all the time, no one ever remembers the sunny Sunday when you greased it off, greased it back on, there was never a ripple in your coffee cup. But the day you beat the living daylights out of them the whole way, they all remember. From—we—in the late '70s, we used to go to Europe on a chairman at the time's working vacation. Well, he'd only fly once a week. So in those days, we had Chrysler of Europe, and they said, "Oh, are you guys available?" Well, of course we are. Better than sitting around a hotel for seven days.

So we were on call, and you never knew which of the three cities you were going to spend the night in or where you were going to go the next day. But the case in point being I—we woke up in Madrid, took some people back up to London, deadheaded over to Paris, and we're sitting there getting ready to bring the president of Chrysler Europe back to London. And the weather is just god-awful. It's moderate to severe turbulence. It's blowing like it was a few days ago, only worse. And three ships sank in the English Channel that day. That'll give you some idea of what the weather was like.

So Don and his two henchmen get on the airplane, and I walk back and I said, "Don, if you really, absolutely, positively don't have to be in London, it's our recommendation you go find yourself a hotel, and we'll go back tomorrow." "No," he said, "I'm having dinner with the PM tonight..."—the Prime Minister—"...on bended knee. 'Please lend us some money.'" And I said, "Well, okay. Here be the rules. You go back, get yourself a can of peanuts or something to drink if—whatever you want. Come back and strap yourself in tight because we're going beat you to death the entire way."

And I don't know if you know the FAA definition of—for turbulence, but “moderate” is you're being thrown into your seatbelt. “Severe” is there is a good chance of structural damage to the airplane. And we were right there. And we were strapped in tight, I guarantee you. So in those days, we weren't carrying around a flight attendant. So as soon as we pull into Gatwick, I zoom back, open the door, and I'm looking at one white face and two greens. And I said, “I don't want to say I told you so, but I told you so.”

JB: Do you have any advice for young people today pursuing their career as a pilot—or any other career? What would you suggest?

RC: Well, I tell every one of the kids that I see these days, you know, get yourself enough STEM training that you understand science and math. But we're at the same point everyone was at in the middle '60s, where if you can pass the physical and the written exam, Northwest was sending people right off the street to the University of North Dakota and getting them a commercial single-engine pilot's license. And some of the guys that I was flying with in the Reserves who were Northwest pilots—so I'm flying with a guy this month who's flown two airplanes in his entire life, a Cessna 172 and a Boeing 727.

And we're right there because all of my contemporaries have retired. The armed forces aren't hatching as many pilots as they once did. And, you know, if you raise your hand—I've been to a couple of these, oh, kind of career meetings that Alaskan and Horizon have had here for youngsters. And they haven't come right out and said, “We'll send you to school,” but the—it was almost, “If things don't get a lot better, we will.” And they aren't going to get any better in terms of having educated, qualified people walk in the door. They're going to take people off the street and make them pilots and—you know, step up, folks, because they're going to be standing there waiting for you.

JB: So nothing but opportunity at this point.

RC: Oh, yeah.

JB: It's just—it's there for the taking, for the most part. How would you describe it? I mean, as a contract pilot? You know, people think of being a pilot as a pretty glamorous life.

RC: Glamorous life?

JB: Yeah—

RC: Getting down on your hands and knees and rubbing the carpet, dumping the john, eating cold leftover food for three days because we didn't get to the hotel in time for the restaurant to still be open? You know, that's the bad—downside. Going here, there, and yonder, yeah, that's kind of cool. Depends on what you want to do. You want a regimented—you know, on this date you're going here, this date you're going there—

you want that kind of lifestyle, fine, yeah, the airlines would be more than happy to supply you with all of that. I kind of liked not knowing what I was going to do next week.

JB: Roy, I've got to thank you for your service.

RC: Thank you.

JB: Yeah, greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this oral history.

RC: Okay.

JB: And we wish you all the best for the future.

[production talk 01:25:09]

01:29:32

***[Training on Whidbey Island]***

JB: So let's talk—if we can talk—

RC: Sure.

JB: ...for a moment about your training on Whidbey Island and the kind of runs you did through the mountains, that kind of stuff?

RC: Oh, yeah.

JB: I have some photos. [hands out photographs]

RC: [laughter] Oh, yeah. Well, you know, everyone complains about the wintertime gray weather here. Well, you know, we used to get up above the clouds, and it was wonderful. But, you know, the whole time, I'm supposed to be doing radar nav. And as I tell folks, for years I knew what the Cascades looked like better on radar than looking out the window. "I don't know, what mountain's that? Oh, that's Mount Baker."

But, oh, one of the things we used to do is we had this one navigation flight where you'd take off from Whidbey, fly to Hoquiam, go 75 miles offshore so that you couldn't cheat, fly down the coast, and coast in at Coos Bay. And then you hit a couple of bridges and railroad tracks, and about three-quarters of the way to the bombing range on the Columbia River, you passed over Crater Lake. And, you know, it was beautiful on radar because it was this big black hole. You couldn't miss it. So, you know, I'd update the computer, and we go up, roll over the lip, wave at the tourists [demonstrates], pull into the crater, cross up the lip, wave at the tourists [demonstrates], back down, and continue



on our way to Boardman Range and then back home.

And because we were—everyone knew we were going to be chasing vehicles around—we'd go out and terrorize the populous. I've chased farmers off their tractors. One day, we're doing practice rocket attacks in some mountains somewhere, and we're going up this valley. And, you know, I know that the computer has fired the—has simulated firing the target—the rockets. And the pilot says, "Roy, you got to look. Get your head out of the boot. You got to see this." And here we are nose-to-nose with a Greyhound bus, and the tire smoke is going both ways, and he's headed for the ditch as we go [demonstrates]. And then, you know, what are you going to do? Make me a lieutenant and send me to Vietnam? I am a lieutenant, and I'm going to Vietnam.

One of my last acts was—Dad was the depot agent in Malta, Montana, and we'd picked up a brand spanking new airplane right off the assembly line at Bethpage, Long Island. And you could only fly for six hours a day when you're ferrying the airplane, and you can't fly in clouds. So—and D.J. [Barry?], who I'm going to fly with, is the only guy I know of who bounced an A-4 off Albemarle Sound doing 400 knots and lived to tell the tale. So he said, "I want to stop in Omaha to see my fiancée." I said, "Sure. Fine." He said, "Tomorrow, being Friday, we cannot get to Whidbey Island before 5:00 in the evening or they're going to put us in the C-130 back to Cherry Point. So we got to get there after 5:00." "Well, just tell me where you want to go." "Okay, fine. I'll see you at 10:00 tomorrow morning."

Type in the coordinates for Malta, Montana, and we come off the valley edge doing 487 knots 25 feet above the ground, right over the depot, do a victory roll, split S—and do it east to west, just to make sure that everyone knew that we'd been there—zoom over to the Missouri River and then worked our way up the Missouri because we're going to land in Great Falls and refuel at the Air Force base there. So we get about ten miles from there and said, "D.J., we have to get out of here now because there are five hydroelectric dams in the next ten miles and there are wires everywhere." Boom, boom, straight up [demonstrates], and, "Malmstrom approach, this is Marine 154906 10 Northeast for landing." "Who?" "Blah, blah, blah." "Where'd you come from?" "Moffett," which is the headquarters of SAC, and it's a SAC base. "Okay, turn left," you know, "heading so-and-so. Intercept the localizer. You're cleared for the approach."

And we land, and there are two blue jeeps sitting there with .50-caliber machine guns waiting for us. And we got escorted to base ops. And en route, I said, "Oh, D.J., we have screwed the pooch." I forgot that they just got through putting 500—300 Minutemen missiles in the five counties around Great Falls, and they're a little nervous and jerky about people just showing up. We shut the engines off and opened the canopy, and this Air Force captain says, "I want to see your hands at all times, and I want to see a set of orders." And I said, "Well, [demonstrates], the orders are down there," one hand.

[laughter]

So I called Dad up an hour-and-a-half later, after we had our [unintelligible 01:37:06] cup of coffee, and he said, “That was you, wasn’t it?” And I said, “Yep.” He said, “Everybody in town knows it was you, too. The phone hasn’t stopped ringing for an hour-and-a-half.” And no one turned us in, which is pretty amazing stuff. Today, you might as well take your wings and go [demonstrates] because you’re gone. Instant court-martial.

JB: How about your training missions over towards Spokane from Whidbey Island?

RC: Yeah, we used to—well, that was kind of your midterm examination, so to speak. You’d go over there and work with the Air Force’s strategic bomb group, where they rate our score—your attack on six targets in Spokane. It takes weeks to plan that mission. And the day I was supposed to do that, I had a cold, and I—the instructor pilot says, “Are you sure you want to do this?” And I said, “I have worked too long too hard. We’re going.” Well, we came down from 16,000 feet to 6,000—whatever it is that we were going to fly the thing at—and I got two sinus blocks that were so bad I thought the teeth were coming out of my head—out of my gums. And he said—and I told him, “You know, I’m in a little pain over here.” And he said, “Well, you know, we can always go home.” And I said, “No, I’ll fight through it. I’ll let you know.”

So we made it. And then we’re flying home and it’s cloudy, so now we got to do an instrument approach into Whidbey. And you can’t just start—and after we climbed back up, [makes sound effect], you know, and the blocks went away. But now we got to come back down again, but you also have to clear the mountains. So we ended up spiraling into Whidbey Island at 200 feet a minute rather than 1,000, and I said, “Thank you.” And I went right to the dispensary and said, “I’m down. Give me some drugs.” So that’s my Spokane story.

01:40:13

[CBU-20 ‘Rockeye’ ordnance]

[cuts to new section]

RC: Rockeyes were \$800,000 apiece.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: What made them...?

RC: Well, it’s a big bomb with a couple thousand bomblets inside. So when you drop the bomb, it goes a ways down the pike, and then the shell opens and the bomblets disperse. Well, in the early cluster bombs, they were circular. The neat things about Rockeyes is they dispersed in a rectangular shape so that, you know, when you’re running trucks or

tanks or whatever—you know, going down a road, you would like to be able to space the bombs such that, you know, it's—maximize your killing.

Well, this major over in the wing said, “Well, I’m not sure if the bomblets are going to go off in the top of the jungle or...” So he loaded up two airplanes with 28 per, a combat photographer in an A-4, and they went and dropped 56 times \$800,000 on a tree line in the open, south of Da Nang. [laughter] And so the next month, we get this missive from the wing, “If you don’t have a good target, you got to bring them back.” [laughter] Fuck me.

JB: I had a question—

RC: Yeah.

JB: ...on this one here. [points to photograph]

RC: Oh, that’s my boys in the Reserves. This guy’s actually—

JB: So these guys are the mechanics?

RC: They’re my ordnance guys. They’re loading up the machine guns.

JB: Okay.

01:42:27

[END OF INTERVIEW]