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Air Force
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Interviewed by Rebekka Hauert

I enlisted because of the draft mainly. It was a lottery and my birth date was coming up and I wanted to be in the Air Force. I thought it would give me a better opportunity instead of just going as a ground troop. I was more technically oriented and wanted to work on aircrafts and weapons systems. I'm for the draft, even now. I think every male and female needs to serve their country. And it gives them good standards.

I went to weapons school in Denver for seven months of training. Then I went to Dallas Air Force Base in Texas where I worked on B-52s. From there I was sent to Vietnam, or actually to Thailand, to work on F-105s.

My job description depended on where I was. On the B-52s we did weapons loading, electrical systems, release systems, took care of the weapons themselves. Overseas I went into gun systems. That was challenging. I had to go to some temporary duty stations a couple of times. I actually had to fly into Vietnam one time—a volunteer type thing—I didn't volunteer for that again. I had some problems on that trip.

What happens is when an aircraft takes some heavy gunfire they go down on a base in Vietnam. So we had to fly over there from Thailand and put the aircraft back in commission again to fly home. Those bases have different aircraft and their people aren't trained to work on that aircraft.

A couple of guys went into places like Laos, and that was fun. I didn't go there. They told me about those. You took off all your ID and you'd fly in there. You weren't supposed to be there, but our aircraft went down and they had some emergency bases. You went on little private planes. But I said, "Nope, that's too much fun." I had enough fun as it was.

I was hopping a flight on an old C-119 gunship and we took some hits. I was just sitting back behaving myself and suddenly a big round come through. A poor guy got hit by it. It was kind of a mess in the back. Because of that accident—they call it an accident because technically the aircraft wasn't supposed to be flying any missions—there was an investigation on it and so I had to stay a few extra days. And my barracks got hit by mortar rounds. That was interesting. They like to build barracks that have two stories. You didn't sleep in the upper story because flak would hit up there. So you'd take your mattress downstairs and sometimes you'd get enough warning to run outside and get in a hole somewhere. But this one just came out of nowhere and kind of pushed in the side of the building a little bit. It took them about thirty to forty-five minutes to get us out. I wasn't really hurt, just stunned.

I cannot remember the name of that base and it's stupid. It was up towards the northern DMZ zone and on the ocean, too. I don't really know who was firing at us. They only take a couple pot-shots at you and then they're gone. Depending on which base you're at, you got the Army or the Marines there protecting you. That's one reason I joined the Air Force, to make them come after me; I don't have to go after them.

I was mostly in Thailand except for that one time. My problem also was that I had AB negative blood and I wasn't supposed to be in a war zone. They had told me about that one time but I had forgotten about it. I was in Vietnam just five days and got hit. What about those guys there for a year? How many times did they get hit?

Technology was good. The B-52s we liked because they flew so high they weren't hit. And let's face it, even in Desert Storm they found out that when you start carpet bombing, it's quite psychological. There was a lot of psychological warfare over there. The only thing I didn't like over there was if you're gonna go to war, keep politicians out. Once you start the war, there's no

politics left. When you start putting politics in war then you start wasting lives that shouldn't be wasted. That's what happened in Vietnam. You wasted a lot of lives taking a hill—okay, that's part of war. But to turn around and give the hill back three days later because, oh, we don't want the hill and let the enemy take it over again, then that's a waste of those lives. I think that's how Vietnam got its bad name.

I could see what they were trying to do. We went in there to protect ourselves. I like the idea that if we go out there and keep it away from here, we're better off. I think Vietnam would've been right without the politics out there. The politics is why it dragged on and got nowhere.

War gets emotional sometimes and then very boring. Depends on how you want to handle it. You had to watch where you were at all the time and stay away from the perimeters. Sniper fire is always out there.

My job was pretty hectic. I put an easy twelve to fourteen hours a day. I lost about forty-five pounds over there.

Once, I opened up the Stars and Stripes and saw my cousin's name in there. He put a bomb in Fresno State's computer. Yeah, the protesters had their thing going on, but they didn't know how that area over there is like.

Quarters were somewhat adequate in Thailand, but they were probably better than the other guys with the fox holes. We always looked at it that way—at least we had a roof over our head. It wasn't that bad. I was at the USO club a lot. They nicknamed me the USO Kid. I lucked out. They closed my base after seven and a half months, and being over there over six months allowed me a whole year credit. But I could've gone back over again. What I did was transfer to F-111s because I liked the technology. In fact, two weeks after I transferred, my old squadron got picked up and sent back to Vietnam.

Coming home was good. Looking back it was strange. I had been trained on B-52s but they chose me to work on F-111s. Why? You don't ask those questions. Same way when I had that one trip going to Vietnam. You didn't ask why that round went there and didn't come where you were sitting and why that poor gentlemen got taken out and you didn't. Even when I was in that barracks, three of them lost their lives and I got cuts and scrapes, nothing for a purple heart. It's where you're at. Someone's looking over you. If you didn't really believe in God before that, you know... .

Everyone needs to go into the military for two years. It gives you ownership of this county. Then when we do have to go to Iraq or Afghanistan or someplace, you understand why. The freedom we have back here isn't free. It has to be earned; it has to be protected; it has to be kept, or someone's gonna take it away from you. There's always little miniature Hitlers out there that want to rule the world and think they can. So we have to work harder.