Conversation with Dave Dollarhide

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Recorded and Transcribed
by
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TAPE 1 SIDE A

LYN-Today is Tuesday and it is the 28th of March, 2017. I am at Doctor's Lake, looking at a beautiful lake, and I am talking to Dave Dollarhide. Dave has a story as part of our Cecil Field project. I am going to let him introduce himself and tell us about his family, his life, his birth and then we are going to talk about his military days.

DAVE-I'm Dave Dollarhide and I was born in Granada, Mississippi in 1942. My father was the band director at the high school and my mother was a cheerleader. He asked for her hand in marriage I believe when she was still in high school or they started dating when she was still in high school, with the permission of my grandfather and grandmother and the school principal. Very different days.

Anyway, I was born in Granada and we later moved to Jackson and grew up in Jackson, went to high school there. Later went to junior college at Hines Junior College followed by two years to finish up a bachelor's degree at Mississippi State.

I have one older brother who is six years older than me and I have a brother who is four years younger and a brother who is ten years younger than me. The only people left in the family are myself and my brother next to me younger and everybody else has passed away. That's where I come from.

At Mississippi State my roommate started taking flying lessons at the local Dixie Airport and I would go out and hang around the airport and that was my introduction to aviation. I was very intrigued. It was interesting that I didn't think about aviation before because my uncle was a B-17 plane commander in World War II. He was shot down and he was a Prisoner of War and I grew up listening to all his humorous stories. He never told any of the bad stuff.

LYN-Now where was he a prisoner of war?

DAVE-I don't know, in Germany, but I don't know which stalag. They changed as the Americans moved in they forced marched them in ten-degree weather for hundreds of miles and there was a lot of suffering that went along with that. He was hero. I loved being around him but I really didn't think of aviation until Mississippi State.

Then one of the kids down the hall in my dormitory had a family friend who was an instructor at Meridian teaching basic jet training to Navy students. He came up one week-end and we went and drank beer one evening with this guy who was by this time he was probably five years older than us. He was making a thousand dollars a month which I couldn't conceive of. I was living on maybe ten dollars a month and a thousand dollars a month was the wildest thing I ever heard in my life. He had been flying off of carriers and was now instructing.

So, when the recruiters came to the campus I had already decided that's what I wanted to do. So, I went to the student union where they had set up the recruiting operation and was talking to an

ensign who was there temporarily from flight training, which the Navy would do. In fact, I did that later on at a different, back at Mississippi State as an ensign in the Navy in flight training I went and spent five days on the campus hanging out with old friends and just wearing the uniform and exposing myself.

I was convinced. They would put me on a Southern Airways DC-3 and flew me up to the Naval Air Station in Memphis and then I signed up after taking all the tests and passing the tests and there were very few of us out of the group of fifty or so that were accepted. I was absolutely thrilled.

LYN-That was in Millington.

DAVE-That was in Millington which later, it was a reserve base. Millington later became just a school's command location as you referred to later with your husband.

So, I started flight training in June of '64 in Pensacola. I had bought a brand-new convertible, a Pontiac convertible on delayed payments, and went and drove through the main gate in with my top down. I parked the car behind Building 633, I still remember. I walked over to the next building which was the US School of Indoctrination and Pre-Flight, the INDOT battalion, which is where you do push-ups and are screened.

I walked in thinking that I would just check in and then maybe go and get a bite to eat somewhere but once I walked in I looked to my left, in this long terrazzo floor passage way, and to my left I saw these people with this horrible looks on their faces, cowering back in the darkness of that bunk room that I could see. In front of me was a cadet officer of the day and he smiled really big and he said, "Welcome."

I walked straight into his office and the sergeant came out and said, "Welcome and where did you go to school and fill out this and sign that." They said, "Just walk out to the right and go join the guys in the squad bay". Suddenly I was in a terrible place wondering for the next few days if I had made the right decision. (Laugh) That's how I got started and it was the best thing that could ever have happened to me.

LYN-I didn't ask, what was your degree at Mississippi State?

DAVE-I took a degree in marketing.

LYN-Sounds creative at that time.

DAVE-Well, marketing was a path of least resistance so I could get a degree so I could do something in life. After I interviewed with Colgate-Palmolive on my campus I decided, "Boy, I'm not selling soap, this is not for me." So, I became convinced right away that wearing that white uniform I saw those recruiters in and going to Pensacola to fly airplanes was a grand

adventure for me. I'd like to say it was a patriotic thing but I think for most kids that age it's an adventure.

LYN-Was there a draft during that time?

DAVE-No. I didn't, none of my contemporaries even knew the name "Vietnam". That was not until I was in VT-4 in Pensacola going through carrier qualifications and gunnery in the T-2, not until then did I hear anything about Vietnam. It was in just in passing. The CIA was looking for some Navy pilots to go fly with them for a few years and it was just a rumor. You heard it but it was happening. I knew nothing of drugs. I was never exposed to any drug anywhere all the way up to my early days in the Navy you know in the civilian world you heard of people, but in my circles those things were just not there. To this day they are still not there.

So, I started flight training in '64 after finishing pre-flight and we went out to Softly Field. I had the highest grades in my class for physical fitness and militarian survival in my class of fifty. I was very proud of that at the time. I wasn't trying to achieve that but it just is what happened.

Navy Aviator Training Planes T-2 and T-34

Then we started Softly Field and primary flight training in the T-34. I took to it fairly quickly. I had never flown an airplane and had never flown in an airplane until my first flight in a T-34. So, but and I wasn't the brightest bulb around but I had natural skills that worked well for me throughout my career.

So, it was time to select if you wanted to go to jets or to props and you had to have good grades to go to jets and that was, the grades were combined from the academic and military fitness and all of that from pre-flight but also your flight grades at Softly. I had the maximum grade for flying and I had everything but I was middle of the road in academics but all the rest of my things pushed me into a number that allowed me to go to jets. There were very few of us that went to jets that week.

LYN-Can you explain at that point what career difference it would have made between props and jets and where you were going?

DAVE-Props could have meant flying transports or it could have been flying S-2's aboard ship, twin-engine anti-submarine airplanes. So, you could have gone to sea either way but if you went to jets you're gonna be going to sea and flying off ships.

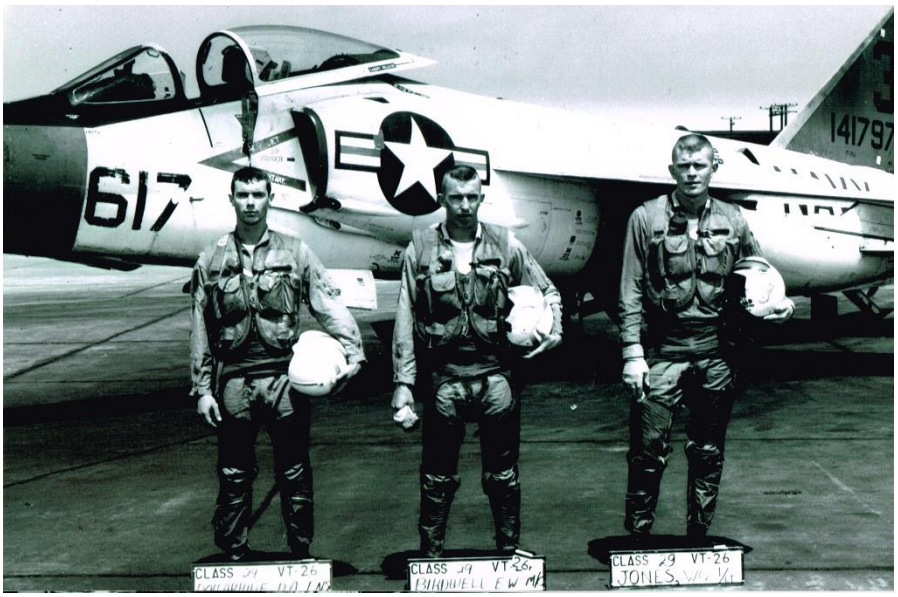
LYN-And your job was going to be attack.

DAVE-No. Not at that point. We went up to Meridian and of course I felt really at home in Mississippi just an hour and a half or two away from my home town of Jackson and everybody else hated Mississippi. I loved it. Then that whole experience early in jets was a thrill. Following that I was transferred to the, down in Pensacola for that period that was VT-4 to carrier qualify. Then on out to Beeville, Texas for advanced flight training where I flew the Cougar.

Dave Dollarhide in Naval Flight Training

LYN-What was the carrier there where you were training? Was that the Lexington?

DAVE-Well, the Lexington was in Pensacola and it was the ship, the training ship, but it was not located in Texas but it would be in the Gulf of Mexico so it was a very quick trip to do whatever we needed to get to the ship. Usually our carrier qualification would be very close off the coast and not too far at sea. We carrier qualed again after the T-2 in basic then in advanced we carrier qualified in the F-9 Cougar. Then after that we, for the final airplane in the training command, we flew the F-11 Tiger which was the Navy's first supersonic airplane.



The Tiger was absolutely one of my favorite airplanes. I only flew twenty-five hours in it but I was absolutely thrilled to fly this airplane and loved the way it handled and the way that it rolled. It didn't yawl when it rolled like most swept-wing jets. It rolled around the fuselage and the next thing I know I'm walking into the ready room and the duty officer in VT-26 says over the crowd, "Dollarhide, that was your last one. Put your uniform of the day on and go see the CO of the base and get your wings." It was kind of anti-climactic.

I went over there and I had no family or anything. In those days there was no huge ceremony at all. It was just the secretary and "Why are you here?" "They told me to come get my wings." "Oh, just a minute."

LYN-Let me find another pair of wings. (Laugh)

DAVE-And so then I stepped back in the CO's office, a very nice guy, and he was delighted to give me my wings. I was happy and a photographer took my picture and I left. The next day I was in my '60 Corvette driving over to Florida to start training in the A-4.

Dave receiving his wings from the Commanding Officer at VT-26
Meridian, Mississippi

LYN-Can you go back to the training on the carrier. Can you remember the first landing?

DAVE-Well, your first experience with fear starts with the catapult shot. Of course, it's daytime in a T-2 back in Pensacola. We went out, I shouldn't say that's the first because you go out and you land on the ship but it was, there was a lot of anxiety but you are concentrating so hard. It's not like many things that people do in your life. There's no one to help you. You are all by yourself. You either do this or you're going to die.

It's a beautiful day and the ship, the deck was steady and I made a nice landing the first time. I taxied up to the number one catapult and this was my first time to experience all these flight deck signals and it was coming at me hot and heavy. So, you're not allowed to look in the cockpit while you are taxing. You've got to keep your eyes on the taxi director and his yellow shirt. You are not allowed to look inside even on the catapult until they give you what's called the tension signal and then when they give the tension signal then you are now allowed to look inside and you've already gone to full power and you're looking inside now to check over your instruments to see if everything is satisfactory. As I look at those instruments I saw nothing. I absolutely saw nothing. None of those numbers meant anything to me whatsoever. (Laugh)

So, my experience was the same as most everybody I talk to because your mind is racing so fast and you are so concerned about what is about to happen. So, you just turn and salute back and when they fired the catapult I had forgotten to take my feet off the brakes. I was pressing the brakes as hard as I could press them.

When they give you that tension signal that's also, aside from looking inside the cockpit, now you're supposed to take your feet off the brakes. You are at full-power but you are being held back by a hold-back fitting. So, as we got airborne I didn't realize I was holding the brakes until right after I got airborne and airplane is flying and now it's a familiar environment and I looked out and you could see the wheels from the cockpit in the T-2 and I looked out at the wheels and sure enough they are not spinning and I was still holding those brakes. (Laugh) It didn't skid the tires at all. It didn't slow me down a bit.

Later in the training command over in Texas, now we're in the Cougar and I've only got four landings aboard ship so far and that was in the T-2. So, now we get on the catapult and this time in the Cougar and I was in a single seat Cougar and as I saluted the catapult officer I forgot to look around ahead so when they shot me I was looking at the guy (Laugh) so I went off the catapult with my head forced back to the back of the headrest looking out the side of the airplane. Of course, there's no way you can turn head back around once it fires.

Then the rest of it you know, the landings were fine until we didn't land at night but later as I transferred over to Jacksonville at Cecil Field and started flying the A-4 with what is called the RAG, the replacement air group, which was an old term that is still used today, then that's when you would carrier qualify a third time but then your fleet airplane, in this case the A-4 and you would also couple that with I think it was six landings during the day and four landings at night.

A-4 Skyhawk

So, we flew from Jacksonville over off the coast of Pensacola and lined up behind the Lexington. In those days there were no white flood lights on the deck. There were red lights. Basically, you couldn't see the flight deck. All you could see was the lights, the center line lights, the little towing runway lights on the flight deck, and then the drop lights, a line of lights that fall behind

the ship to allow you to perceive the line-up because that light, row of lights is 90 degrees straight down to the water. If you're off center line right or left then you see an angle in the center line row of lights and it just helps in your line-up. But I didn't see the ship at all until basically I came over and I thought I was dead.

I mean, I was so, and my experience is exactly the same as every other student. At night it is absolutely terrifying. All you can do is concentrate as hard as you can on the meatball which gives you your glide path, a visual bar of light between some green lights or maybe they're blue and then you're getting your line-up by looking at that illuminated center line. I didn't bolter. I tracked and I did it three more times and then launched back over to Jacksonville and I was so elated. I was beside myself. I was in my little airplane all by myself flying back over to Jacksonville.

LYN-So you did landings in that one night.

DAVE-Four. That did the night qualifications.

LYN-So you went with some degree of bravery, then it got more daunting, but then there was the exhilaration.

DAVE-Night time never lessened until, I should correct that statement. Nighttime was always and still is daunting but in today's environment, in fact my next carrier landing was on the Forrestal.

LYN-Where was it then?

DAVE-It was off the coast of Virginia. We had flown up from Jacksonville in the A-4, no that was in the RAG, but now I'm in my fleet squadron VA-46 and we went up to make some landings aboard ship and that included some night flying. But they had the white flood lights and the white flood lights illuminated the whole flight deck and it make it incredibly more comfortable than the moonglows, those red lights.

U.S. Navy Pilot Dave Dollarhide

LYN-Why was the Lexington lighted that way?

DAVE-They were transitioning to white lights. The Forrestal was one of the first carriers to receive the white flood lights. Of course, the moon glows were there to prevent damaging your night vision because red lights won't ruin your night vision. All the instrument lights in a cockpit in Navy airplanes are red so it doesn't destroy your night vision for coming back to the ship.

So, anyway, we were flying at night and they had white flood lights and I think it was about the fourth or fifth day we were at sea. I was night-flying and there were only three A-4's airborne, no other airplanes, and we were just flying to, define a course from the ship away and then back in-bound to the ship at a specific altitude and specific speed so the ship could calibrate their radars. So, we were doing that individually on different radios talking to different controllers, the three of us. It was time to come back to the ship and I was lower on fuel and so they put us in what they call load marshall. Normally you would start, you would hold at twenty thousand feet and then stack one thousand-foot layers above that. But in this case, you hold at five thousand feet and stack. They put me at five so I could be the first one down because I was lower on fuel.

The weather at the ship was supposed to be really good. That was the last that they had told us. They didn't tell us that they had moved into a rain storm and the weather was horrible. They didn't tell us that this was not going to be a carrier-controlled approach that it was going to be a non-precision approach which requires higher minimums.

So, they delayed the approach and delayed and delayed it because there was a new flight deck crew and they were trying to get their procedures down and everything was just dragging. So finally, they cleared me for marshall and I started into the ship and the rain was pounding on my little windshield. The windshield on an A-4 is probably six inches across, maybe as much as eight inches across and there's a windshield wiper that moves across that small little windscreen. That's the so-called bullet-proof portion of the windscreen, very thick glass.

It's banging away up there and the rain is pounding on the airplane and I am concentrating so hard on watching the mileage from the ship on the distance measuring equipment, the DNE, and as I got closer and I keyed the mike and I said, "Hey, I'm still at twelve hundred feet. When are you gonna start me down?" They said, "Say again. You're supposed to be six hundred feet. This is a case two recovery." So, I immediately push the nose over and I'm watching the distance to the ship get closer and I leveled off at six hundred feet and I could see that if I didn't let down shortly after that there was no way I would even make the ship to ship. I couldn't see anything. I was just in heavy clouds with the rain pounding on the windshield. I couldn't see anything. I could feel the blood pulsing in my temples maybe but I couldn't see anything. (Laugh)

So, I started, you're supposed to stay at six hundred feet and if you don't see the ship then you go and make a missed approach. Those were the rules but that was seldom the way it was actually

done. I didn't know, I was so green all I know is I've gotta go home and home is the ship. So, I started letting down from six hundred feet thinking, "I wonder how high the mast head is on that destroyer after the ship?"

So, with the little windshield pounding I don't see anything and I'm inside a half a mile and I'm right about two hundred feet above the water. I've got a radio altimeter so I have accurate altitude information. So, I know that I'm not hitting the water. I'm not far away from the water because I know it's accurate. Then the landing signal officer, our safety officer, Bill Kitsch, came up on the radio and said, "OK, Dave, I've got you in sight." Just about that same time I started to see a very faint white glow ahead of me which were these new white flood lights on the ship.

It was like you were standing in a street and a block away someone is holding up a dimly-lite flashlight. That's all I could see. I never saw the ship. He talked me down. "Turn right, start your turn, you're doing OK." But the LSO's will never say, "You're high, come down" because when they do that they may talk you into hitting the ramp. They could kill you with that kind of conversation. But there was a code in every squadron that people usually would know about that the LSO's in that squadron would use with his pilots and it would be, in my squadron it was "Now fly it on down."

What "now fly it on down" meant was you cannot hit the ramp, you've got it made. In the A-4 you would just push the nose forward and just let it plump onto the deck. I didn't know that. Nobody had told me that. So, I held what I had and I touched down on the deck and as I touched down on the deck I never saw the meatball, I never saw any of the landing aid, and only when I touched down on the flight deck I saw the island going by on the right and boom full power back in the rain. I missed the wires.

So now I come back around. The other two guys came in and I fly it on down and push the stick forward. They were able to land. There may have been a variance in the rain patterns and visibility too. I can only relate my experience. I came back around and the same exact thing occurred and I boltered and now I just barely have enough fuel to get back to Oceana. I think we were about a hundred and fifty miles at sea.

So as soon as I got off the end of the ship I just reached down and I pulled an emergency bomb release handle that jettisoned a two, three-hundred-gallon drop tank and a bomb rack. That got rid of a lot of drag and the airplane went to thirty-seven thousand feet before I could even think about it. It was just amazing because I was so light. I had no fuel. Then you follow this very strict profile and I made it back to Oceana and landed with a few minutes of fuel left. So that was my introduction to night-flying in the fleet.

LYN-So, what were the comments that you got after that experience?

DAVE-No comments except Bill Kitsch says, "You were flying the airplane great." He said, "I couldn't have asked for anyone to fly the airplane better it's just that when I said 'Now fly it on down' you didn't drop your nose to land."

LYN-Because you didn't know.

DAVE-Because I didn't know.

LYN-They didn't tell you the code.

DAVE-But nobody cared. It was that kind of thing is so routine in that environment that there is nothing for anybody to say except that "No harm, no foul".

LYN-So at that point you are still determined that this is absolutely for you.

DAVE-Oh no. That did not deter me at all. No, no, no. It did not deter me at all.

LYN-By this time have you married? Did you marry in the military?

DAVE-No, I was not married. I was single. So, we continued work-ups with the Forrestal as it was trying to train its crew and over the next few months we would go out once and a while to operate off the ship for short periods.

LYN-Do you remember when the Forrestal was commissioned?

DAVE-I should know that but I want to say probably 1958 or there abouts. It was the very first super carrier.

LYN-What is a super carrier?

DAVE-It was just probably a third again larger than any of the World War II ships.

LYN-So the size. On the carrier on a cruise about how many people would be housed on that carrier?

DAVE-Five thousand. A small city crammed into a thousand feet.

LYN-How many decks?

DAVE-Well, I don't know that number. The hangar deck is the first deck and above that are not decks they are levels. So, there would be on a large ship there were probably three levels before you got to the flight deck and then there is the island so maybe it maybe be up to a total of nine decks.

LYN-Explain what an island is.

DAVE-The island is the only portion of the ship sticking up above that flight deck, the landing deck. The island is the home for the captain and all of his staff to operate the ship and there are some other uses in the bottom part of that for flight deck control and those sorts of things.

LYN-By the time you came to get in your aircraft those planes had already been lifted by elevator onto the flight deck and you depended on it to be ready to fly.

DAVE-Yeah, we would be on a schedule to fly and we would meet in our squadron ready room and we would talk about the mission and we would talk about everything we were going to do in great detail. Then close to our ready room on the second deck, which is one deck below the hangar deck, there was an escalator, and it was the only escalator on the ship but it was right outside our ready room door and there were two ready rooms close by there, right next to each other. We would ride the escalator up to the flight deck in our heavy flight gear. Then we would go to our assigned number. We didn't necessarily know where it was on the flight deck. You just walk on the flight deck and pick out your assigned number and that's the airplane you're supposed to pre-flight and then man.

LYN-Well, you mentioned the yellow shirt. The yellow shirt designated what?

DAVE-The yellow shirt was a taxi director. Purple was the fuel. Blue was maintenance. Green was, no green was maintenance I've got it wrong. Blue were the guys with muscles and they would carry the chains and they did a lot of hard labor up there. (Laugh) That's remained standard things in common today.

LYN-People are going to read this don't even know what we're talking about. I didn't know about the yellow shirts.

So, go back to Cecil. When you got orders did you know anything about Cecil Field?

DAVE-No, I knew nothing about Cecil other than it was a master jet base, a term used for Oceana and Cecil on the East coast and on the West coast Miramar and Lemoore were termed "master jet bases".

LYN-There were only four in America.

DAVE-They were high functioning jet bases. Only four in America, yeah. So, I showed up and checked into the bachelor officer's quarters and started all that training I mentioned earlier. Then I joined my fleet squadron, the VA-46 Clansmen. The first commanding officer of VA-46 was, his last name was McDougal. So, his family tartan was painted on our airplanes and we assumed that clansman persona all the way until the day the squadron was decommissioned at Cecil in about '92. And decommissioned is the wrong term for a squadron. You can only commission and decommission a ship. It is dis-established is the correct term.

LYN-So from the time you got to Cecil, you said that you were not deployed often.

DAVE-Well, I joined the squadron and then they had just come back from the Mediterranean cruise on the Saratoga and so we were scheduled and that was in the fall and then we were scheduled the next summer to go to combat in Vietnam on the Forrestal. So, we had all the whole winter and spring in which we were just training and we would deploy out to the Forrestal and we would do work-ups and help the ship just get itself into a good training situation.

LYN-So you knew where you were headed. There was not any…

DAVE-We knew we were going to Vietnam, yes. So, we were training out of Cecil and we were using the local target areas at Cecil. Those targets names were Pine Castle which is still in use today. Others were Rodman Target, Putnam Target, Steven's Lake Target which is Camp Blanding today. It was then too but we didn't use an aerial bombing target there and that restricted area is still there, it's just no longer used.

LYN-I'm going to interject this. I was just at the premier of a movie on Camp Blanding. Did you happen to know about that movie? At channel 7 this last week. My father was at Camp Blanding. I didn't realize that until I started researching family. Camp Blanding has served many purposes and is still serving many purposes.

DAVE-I'm very familiar with it. The longest serving adjutant general of any air guard in America was Doug Burnett, a very close friend of mine. He served the governor as a two-star general in charge of the air and army guard for twelve years. He was followed by Buddy Titshaw who did more of a normal tenure. Both of them long-term guard pilots. Both of them excellent people. So, I went to their change-of-commands out at Camp Blanding and experienced that whole thing. In fact, we used to go out there and water ski out there at Camp Blanding.

LYN-There are very few buildings left from World War II obviously just some pilings but they did a short documentary and I had opportunity to visit with a man who was there at the premier downtown, Mr. Bell, who was ninety-nine and it was on my daddy's birthday, he would have ninety-nine.

DAVE-Oh my goodness.

LYN-I just found his picture in uniform so I took it. It was the Bell's seventy-sixth anniversary. So, I felt it was a good way to celebrate your daddy's birthday even though he has long been gone. I hope you get to see that little documentary. I hope we get one on Cecil.

DAVE-Now this was produced by the Guard itself.

LYN-No, it was produced by two men at Channel 7 in cooperation with the Guard.

DAVE-A lot of history there.

LYN-Enormous history.

DAVE-You know the German POW's were there.

LYN-German POW's, right. I think they had a very luxurious life the way they talk about it.

DAVE-They probably all remained and became Americans.

LYN-Many did. They had stories about those. They worked there and it wasn't like they had ball-and-chains. They lived a pretty good life there as compared to what some Americans had lived. We did have quite a number of German spies during the war here in this area. There is a very interesting history there.

DAVE-When my uncle was shot down in his B-17 in the Netherlands, at some point they after being at the stalag he went to see the camp commandant and I won't go through the whole story but I can remember my uncle telling me these stories when I was a kid. I remember every one of them vividly. They were all humorous but I didn't know at the time he was suffering from PTSD so severe he couldn't talk about it in a serious way at all. So, he made light of everything.

LYN-So let's put his name on tape.

DAVE-Brooks Vance and he was a B-17 pilot who lived in Batesville, Mississippi and so he is talking to the camp commandant, had been called in for a conversation and there was a sentry by the door and as he was asked questions he gave his name, rank, and serial number as required. Then the German major said, "You know what I think Lt. Vance, I think you are a spy. Do you know what we do to spies?" He snapped his fingers and the sentry comes over and puts a 9-millimeter to his head.

My uncle stuttered severely in normal conversation. He never stuttered on the radio in an airplane, somewhat like Mel Tillis singing. But he said, and he's six foot six, huge tall guy. He was looking at the highly plush carpet under his feet and he's got this gun to his temple and he says, "No, no, no sir you won't shoot me because I'll bleed all over your carpet." (Laugh) The major didn't even get a smile on his face. He told the sentry to reassume his position. He said, "We know you're not a spy Lt. Vance. We know you're from Batesville, Mississippi. Your wife's name is Louise. Your son's name is Brooksie you call him and you are on your nineteenth mission, pardon me, eighteenth and a half mission." They knew everything.

LYN- So back to Cecil Field. When you arrived there did you think, well it looked like Mississippi maybe. It was isolated from everything or did that even enter your mind?

DAVE-Well, so was Beeville Naval Air Station, way out of town. No, that, I mean it was Florida and I was just happy to be here and I was just focused on my new environment and enjoyed every bit of it.

LYN-At the time there were three Naval Air Stations in the area, Mayport and JAX.

DAVE-I had a navigation chart, an aviation navigation chart called a sectional chart for Jacksonville in 1945. In 1945 there were twenty-three airports, Navy airports in and around the immediate Jacksonville area.

LYN-Twenty-three. We were a Navy town more than we knew.

DAVE-Just to give you a feel for it. I have that chart. What I plan to do with it is scan it a section at a time and I can email it.

LYN-So you are Cecil Field and you know that you are training to go on the Forrestal and you know that it is a new super carrier so that feels like good stuff, the size and importance. Where were we in America on the Vietnam era at that point?

DAVE-Well, that's before all the anti-war things started. When I got to Cecil, Jacksonville was never was one of those uncomfortable places to be in that regard anyway. Jacksonville has always been a welcoming place. I do remember my first experience in Jacksonville was if you wanted to take your girlfriend out to dinner you could go to the Green Derby. You could go over at the farmer's market to Sandy's Steer Room and they had great steaks and white cargos were their drink. Or you could go to the Sea Turtle. The only three restaurants really worthy of having a nice dinner.

LYN-So you're learning about Jacksonville and you're prepared to go to the Forrestal.

DAVE-Well, we're on the Forrestal. We're on and off the ship and we're doing work-up cruises before going to Vietnam.

LYN-It's still in Norfolk.

DAVE-The ship was in Norfolk.

LYN-Did it ever come to Mayport?

DAVE-Was it based here you mean? I don't think so. [the Forrestal did later station at Mayport] I don't think it ever was but in that world, it didn't really matter. It was only an hour flight to go there. So, we would go up and carrier qualify on the ship or exercise the ship as they needed in preparing the air wing and the ship to go to combat.

LYN-What year is this that you are ready to go?

DAVE-'67. So, we deployed, finally went aboard. I flew up with several of our squadron airplanes to fly aboard the ship after it left port at Norfolk. My tail hook wouldn't come down fully so I was unable to come aboard ship so I was told to return to Cecil and see if I could make a repair and to meet the ship in Puerto Rico. So, after telling everybody goodbye in Jacksonville, "I'm going to war" a few hours later I'm back.

LYN-At Cecil.

DAVE-I'm back at Cecil. (Laugh) VA-44 took a look at my airplane. They never actually repaired it but the hook was up. It was safely up. But I thought it was repaired. They told me it was repaired and I flew on to, I just left Jacksonville by myself, no flight plan just decided that I would go down to Guantanamo Bay to refuel there. Of course, I was uncertain about the distance of trying to go non-stop to Roosevelt Roads.

I landed there, was standing in front of the tower talking to a friend I had bumped into. There was another carrier there off the coast of Cuba doing work-ups for their own next cruise. I forget where they were going, Mediterranean maybe, when a flight of F-4's came into the break and the lead F-4 lost his engine and both pilots ejected right there in front of us and the airplane crashed in the water and I was there long enough to know that the Rio died and was never recovered. The pilot got out.

I thought, "That's enough of that, maybe I should get on over to Rosie Roads" so I got in my little A-4 and I flew it about five hundred feet all the way over to Puerto Rico. It was not a long flight really. When I got there, they had to start working on that hook so they sent a mechanic in from the ship which was by that time off the coast of Puerto Rico.

The mechanic came over to work on the airplane and in the meantime one of our airplanes had, on a catapult shot just off the coast of Puerto Rico, lost his wheel, a main wheel and tire and so he had to pull his gear up and he came over to Roosevelt Roads and landed on his drop tanks into a foamed runway. Rocky Pratt was his name from VA-106. The air station ops officer came over and picked me up in his pick-up truck and said, "Come with me, you need to see one of your buddies that's going to try to land on his tanks here."

LYN-You got to see that.

DAVE-I was standing right by the runway when he did that and it was very successful. In fact, they jacked the airplane up, they removed the two tanks, put a new wheel on it and within two hours it flew back out to the ship with the nose skinned up a little bit. (Laugh) I keep going with these little side stories.

LYN-I think they are wonderful.

DAVE-I'm just giving you a flavor for a Naval aviator's experience as we started toward this big cruise to go to Vietnam. Now the ship is there and we went through an operational readiness inspection and we passed that and then started down toward Rio and we cross the equator and went through the transition from POLYWOGS to becoming SHELLBACKS being the first time to cross the equator. It was an extremely chaotic thing aboard ship. It was like anarchy. It was really scary because people were running around almost out of control and we finally went through, not to go through all of that, but we finally went through that whole ceremony and then

showed up in Rio and we spend two days off the shore of the coast of Rio and it was some diplomatic kind of visit I think it was.

Following that we started to cross the South Atlantic to cross south of Africa and then on up to the Philippines through the Straights of Sunda between Java and Sumatra. While we were in the South Atlantic the captain decided that we needed to fly to keep our skills up. The deck was pitching twenty feet up and down which was huge. So, they can't use the normal landing aid, the meatball the Fresnel lens, so we couldn't use it because it was outside the limits of the ship's gyros to keep up with the pitching deck. So, the LSO had to use a manual lever to position the meatball on the glide path as he saw you, just eye-balling where you are in the sky.

It's amazing how accurate he can be but the deck is pitching so and he doesn't want you to hit the deck so he's gonna show you low but when you're safe suddenly the meatball would go to the top of the mirror which meant that you had got it made. So, we launched. The deck was pitching crazy. The only smart thing they did was not launch the very large supersonic Vigilantes, the reconnaissance airplanes because they tend to hurt themselves on hard carrier landings. So, we went out with no divert field anywhere close by. We had no place to go except back to the ship.

LYN-Home was home again.

DAVE-We all came aboard and everybody came aboard fine. There were a lot of bolters, anti-power to go around because you missed the wires or were given a "wave-up" by the LSO because of the pitching deck. The very last airplane to land was the A-3 tanker, an airplane that would provide in-flight refueling resources while we're all flying around.

So, as the deck was pitching it started down and the LSO decided to accept the A-3 to come aboard but it didn't go through a full cycle and as the rear of the ship moved downward it stopped half-way from its full cycle and then started back up which caused the closure rate on the A-3 on its touchdown to be excessive. It collapsed the gear, the left main gear on this A-3 and he went over into the catwalk on the left side but stayed on the flight deck fortunately and then they tied it to the flight deck while the crewmen escaped out the hatch on the top. Just another event in route to go to war.

Then our visit to the Philippines and we were there for about two or three days. We did some flying out of the Philippines, more training flights. Then left the Philippines to go to the Gulf of Tonkin.

The Forrestal became the very first ship to immediately start into the well-known Alpha Strikes. The term "Alpha" comes from the type of targets. There was an "A" list and a "B" list. [Alpha strike is a term used by the United States Navy to denote a large air attack by an aircraft carrier air wing, first coined during the Vietnam War] We never used the term "B" that I know of but

we would say “Alpha” because we were going to an Alpha target. That’s a very dangerous, high-defended target. All of them were in North Vietnam.

All the other ships had gone to Dixie Station, a position in the Gulf of Tonkin that was south of Yankee Station, obviously named for North and South. They would do close air support in South Vietnam to kind of expose them to combat and let them provide that function before they went to Yankee Station to go into these extremely large strikes over North Vietnam, hostile strikes.

USS Forrestal CV-59

But we went straight to Yankee Station and so I had the duty the very first day, the squadron duty officer, the SDO, so I was on the desk and the ready room the whole first day and I remember I was pretty light-hearted because I was not going. (Laugh) I remember Andy Malcolm started to walk out the door of the ready room to go fly his very first combat mission, I said, “Andy” and he jerked back around like I had something important to say and I said, “Hey, if you don’t make it can I have your stereo?” (Laugh) He was not amused and he said, “Oh, God” and he left.

But that is just a part of Naval aviation. You’re going into combat so levity is part of the way of coping. It is really hard. We were not there long enough to fly continuous combat for over a

long period of time because on our fifth day of operations we were manning up airplanes to go into an Alpha strike and at that point this would have been my, it was the fifth day so it would have been my fourth combat flight.

The other three days prior to that I had flown a couple of mini-Alpha strikes of only twelve or thirteen airplanes. Then we flew an Alpha strike to the Thanh Hoa Bridge which was a famous bridge that never wanted to fall and it was a critical bridge for supplying South Vietnam.

We flew that mission and now it's the fifth day on the line flying combat and we were in the airplanes. I had, during the brief in the ready room they talked about the ordinance that we were carrying that day and let us know that we had two M-65 one thousand-pound bombs. I had no idea what an M-65 was. It turns out it was a World War II left over.

It was a fat bomb designed for prop carries and not high-speed carriage. These bombs, when I got to the airplane had rust all over them. We were carrying those bombs because McNamara was running the Pentagon like it was a corporation manufacturing and selling widgets and not a life and death situation. He simply saw that we were wasting this ordinance that was in bunkers in the Philippines and needed to be used. Nobody told him, or they discounted the fact that the age of these bombs meant that the high explosive in them is now much more critical and more susceptible to going off high order. In other words, in the explosives, not just burn with very little heat applied to them.

So, I started up and my plane captain took half the chains off the airplane. We were tied to the flight deck all the time unless we were taxying. So, he left the flight deck and I was looking forward up the flight deck to the airplane next to me and I suddenly heard a large "whomp" sound, a very heavy "whomp" sound. Then Crash Damore, in the VA-106, A-4 to my left, the direction I was looking was looking back my way and I could see the fear in his face. This is all in milliseconds taking place. I looked to my right and the flight deck was on fire underneath my right wing and flowing aft around John McCain's airplane and flowing further aft and engulfing the airplanes parked behind that as the wind was coming across the flight deck.

We had just launched an A-3 so we had at least twenty-five or thirty knots of wind down the flight deck. It was forcing the fire flames to the aft. One of our mechanics was back-peddling out of the fire just to the right of my airplane and he was burned almost over his total body and he was terribly injured and I won't describe his injuries. He was terribly injured from the shrapnel that had come from the exploding rocket.

A rocket had been inadvertently fired from an F-4 across the flight deck. It was not fired like the pilot pressed the trigger. It was inadvertently fired. The pilot in the F-4 did nothing to make this happen. It just happened. So that rocket, supersonic rocket came across the flight deck in a microsecond and hit the drop tank of Fred White which was two airplanes down from me on the other side of McCain.

That four-hundred-gallon fuel tank exploded as a fuel bomb type of explosion. The shrapnel from that had caused these injuries to the other people around the flight deck. This is before a bomb even went off. But now the flight deck is covered in burning jet fuel and just the sights I saw outside my airplane caused a huge adrenalin flush and I had no ladder in the cockpit….

TAPE 1 SIDE B

DAVE-So as the fuel bomb exploded then that's when I looked back around and saw these terrible sights on the flight deck which caused a huge adrenalin flush on my part and so I immediately unstrapped and with no ladder to the airplane and the cockpit height of somewhere around eleven or ten or eleven feet in the air I just leaped to the flight deck. I landed on the steel flight deck on my hip and my arm. I broke my hip and broke my arm. At least two people came over to me quickly and helped me get up and we moved to the front of my airplane toward the center of the flight deck. Suddenly they were no longer around me.

A green shirt, a mechanic from VF-11, his name was Joe Battain reached out his arms to me and I lunged for him and the two of us fell to the flight deck and when we fell to the flight deck now our feet are pointed toward the fire. In the brief second or so of us falling, I could see that, I could see my flight leader Gary Stake in his cockpit totally engulfed in fire with the canopy open. It was over a hundred degrees out so we had our canopies open. Gary was in his airplane burning with the fire around him.

Fred White was on the ladder trying to get out in the middle of the fire. It was god-awful, terrible things to see. In the blink of an eye the first thousand-pound bomb went off high order about fifty feet away from me. So, I don't remember a noise, a sound. I just remember this incredible shock wave. It scooted me, it moved me on the non-skid steel deck. It probably moved me a foot up the flight deck, just the shock wave.

I took shrapnel in my hip and I took shrapnel in my foot. I started to get up, I opened my eyes after the explosion and the sky was filled with debris and I started to get up. My first thought was to get out from under the debris and away from the fire. So, I stood up and Battain said, "No, stay down." I said, "No, let's get out of here." So, I just started hop, skipping, and jumping with my broken hip up toward the island which is about mid-ship on the starboard side of the ship.

I dove under, it was either a F-4 or a RA-5C just parked just after the island. I dove under the nose of that airplane going in a straight line and then somebody came out from behind the island. A lot of people were cowering behind the island to avoid the bomb shrapnel. Somebody came out quickly and helped me back to my feet and over to the protection of the island.

So, more bombs continued to explode. We had a total of nine, one thousand-pound bombs to go off on the flight deck making gigantic holes in this very thick steel and making subsequent holes smaller and smaller as jet fuel poured down into the bowels of the ship.

Most of the people killed were killed down in the, and they were night-check crews right there in their bunks. So, all of this fire and burning fuel just filled up these spaces below the flight deck and even lower. So, it was a terrible thing going on. The safety of the ship itself was in severe jeopardy.

July 29th 10:51, 1967. So, I was taken into a hatch on the backside of the island. My squadron, Dick Housing, happened to be standing there and he was not, he was just in his flight suit he was not flying on that launch. But he was standing there and they started to remove my flight gear and Dick took my flight gear. I remember that and then somebody picked me up and started carrying me down about, I don't know, all the way down to the second deck which was a long way down ladders because you know there are not stairways aboard ship, it's ladders, very steep ladders.

This guy carried me all the way down to sick bay and I was one of the first people to arrive in the sick bay ward two. In short order it turned into a very nasty scene. Our mechanic who had been injured next to my airplane was brought down just after all the beds had been filled. So, he was laid on a mattress between me and the bed adjacent to me. I won't go into that but it was a terrible scene to watch him struggle for life. He didn't make it. He died a few hours after.

They started off-loading a lot of people as quickly as they could, the more-seriously injured to the USS Repose which was nearby and to some of the other carriers. There were two other carriers in the area, three total in the Gulf of Tonkin.

LYN-So the men who were in the air could have landed then on those other carriers.

DAVE-That's what they did. They went to Danang or they landed on another ship. I don't think there was anybody returning to land and you know I just don't know that part. But that's a really good question. I never thought about that but I know we had only launched one A-3 and he had to divert but before he did he circled the ship and watched all this happen and then he flew to Danang to land I think it was.

So, it started, things started to stabilize in sick bay and some kid had come up and said, "I've never done this" but he sewed up the injury on my foot. They just had this open wound in my hip was just left until we got to the Philippines. That was, the ship burned for about two days until they finally got all the fires out. There were so many acts of heroism it was just incredible. Most people were just like me. They were just a survivor that made it.

We lost a hundred and thirty-four people. It was the worst peace-time shipboard accident in the Navy's history. As a result of the Forrestal fire a lot of things changed because there were some serious mistakes made about procedural mistakes which caused the rocket to fire, premature arming of the weapon and those kind of things.

The Navy took quick action. They did an intensive investigation. The JAG accident report is seven thousand pages long. So, they looked at everything. There were a lot of changes made in the Navy as a result of the Forrestal but the two years prior to that had been three other serious accidents.

I think it was two years prior, there had been, suddenly there was this impetus to make all these changes to make it safer aboard ship. They started sending all of the aviation people, the air wings to ship-board fire-fighting schools and those kinds of things. They came out with individual oxygen-breathing equipment devise at everyone's bedside. They banned rockets from being used aboard ship. They quit using Napalm which was not used in North Vietnam at all. So, there were a lot of changes as a result of that. So, then I was off-loaded in the Philippines.

LYN-Let me ask, the planes on the flight deck were all lost?

DAVE-No, but we lost sixty million dollars' worth of airplanes which was a huge sum in 1967. My squadron had, we had thirteen airplanes and we had five that were still flyable.

LYN-You lost how many pilots?

DAVE-We lost three pilots, just the three pilots that I was flying with that day. I'm the only one in my flight to survive. So, Gary Stark, Fred White, and Dennie Barton. We lost a total of nine people from my squadron. I can't think of his first name but Ott [Thomas D., II] and then Zwerlein [Robert L.] were some of the names of the enlisted men. I have a list that can be used at Cecil of both those killed in VA-106 and 46, both squadrons from Cecil.

Standing: ?, Dave Swanson, Brian Keller, ? Jim Dowd, Bud Breckner, Goldstein?, Jack Ohara, Kelly Carr, ?
Kneeling: Brian Walker, Curt Ayres, Dave Dollarhide, Norm ?, Gerry Stark

LYN-You mentioned a name that is famous, another pilot who did survive, John McCain. What was his squadron?

DAVE-He was in my squadron VA-106. He was flying with Herb Hope. Herb Hope was the air wing operations staff officer and he was in one of our airplanes flying a mission with John. That's what they were scheduled to do. We were all going to fly together on the same big strike but they were broken down into different elements and he was not flying.

But the only pilots killed at all, there were injuries because shrapnel was flying all around the flight deck, but were in my flight. John, when you see the flight tape you can see my helmet come up and John's helmet come up. You can see us both hit the flight deck almost exactly the same time. He jumped clear of the fire. I jumped clear the fire to the left, not very graciously, but sustained those injuries I mentioned. So, we both escaped and ran up toward the island.

LYN-That was in some way recorded, there are films.

DAVE-Oh yes.

LYN-They are used even today in training.

DAVE-They probably still use them in training. I know for twenty or thirty years they used the tape from the Forrestal in firefighting school for example at Oceana or Norfolk, the Naval Station at Oceana or Norfolk, one or the other.

LYN-And at Mayport.

DAVE-Well, at Mayport. There is a firefighting school there. I went through that firefighting school in the reserves.

LYN-My husband went through that firefighting school. That is one memory I had of the Forrestal. It did take on a nickname.

DAVE-Not well received by people who were there. Extremely hostile name for those who survived. It is so for the obvious reason that it is making light. It's making light of what as most people interpret it, this huge tragedy.

I will be speaking at the next Forrestal reunion in Washington this coming July. Nobody there will say that and most of the people in the Forrestal Association were aboard the Forrestal in the fire.

LYN-How many people gather?

DAVE-Probably a couple hundred. They do it every year. They do it every year and most everybody suffers from PTSD from that one day in 1967.

LYN-So these are survivors of that particular event.

DAVE-Most of them probably are. In fact, I'm wrestling with the subject of my speech and the subject of my speech for now is intended to be about PTSD and our exposure to that accident and how it has affected our lives and the value of the Forrestal Association and bringing people who went through that together into conversation so it serves as a healing.

LYN-I believe you will do a fine job.

DAVE-I don't want to drag up and open up old wounds and so I've been conferring with one enlisted guy from the Forrestal who I became good friends with. He was on the flight deck the day of the fire. He was ship's company. I met him in Ft. Lauderdale at a small Forrestal reunion of maybe fifty people in probably I think it was 2010, Ben Hedgepath.

Ben lives in Longmont, Colorado and we've communicated pretty much non-stop for the past fifteen, sixteen years off and on. I remember him saying, we were at dinner with our wives sitting at a table and he says in 2010 he says, "I remember you." I said, "What do you remember you remember me, how could you possibly remember me?" He said, "Oh no, I was on the flight deck. I didn't know your name but I remember you. I was on the flight deck and when you guys

came up to go fly combat as far as I was concerned you guys were gods. I wanted to be what you were doing."

So now I fly with experimental airplanes with some old retired friends and we do formation and we do fly-overs for funerals of fallen airmen and things like that.

But we also go out west in our little airplanes every summer and we camp in the mountains in Idaho and Montana. Usually on the way we stop the first day in Longmont, Colorado. It's about a little short of a ten-hour flight day for us to get to Colorado from here. Ben joins us for dinner and every time we finish dinner, Ben and I will stay aside for a while and converse. We never do so without tears. So, I was asking him about the, my subject matter for the speech in July and he is all for it. He, like so many, he didn't know for years if he was just an isolated case of somebody who was still suffering from it. But the Forrestal Association brought together people who were experiencing the same thing.

LYN-How was the association established?

DAVE-Almost every ship that ever served has an association out there. It was in existence probably way before the Forrestal fire.

LYN-Then after that day.

DAVE-OK, so now…well in sick bay it's chaotic. I can hear on the hangar deck straight up above us I can hear whistles blowing. I can hear equipment moving and they are shoving airplanes and fuel and weapons over into the Tonkin Gulf outside of the hangar deck to save the ship. I remember Dick Ryan, my squadron mate coming down and finding me in bed in the sick bay and I remember telling him that it was god-awful down there. It was a shock just to walk into that place.

In fact, at one point, McCain came by my bed and we spoke a little bit. I told Dick, my roommate, I said, "Look, I don't know if this ship is gonna make it but I want you to come down this way if it looks like this thing is going to go down, if it starts listing or you think it's going down, I want you to come down and get me and I'm gonna meet you half-way up because it was in serious condition. Of course, it didn't and we survived and then the next thing I know we're in the Philippines and we were being off-loaded and going to the infirmary there at Subic Bay, actually Cubie Point. We were at the infirmary at Cubie Point. It's all the same place basically.

So, a few days there and they did a secondary closure on the wound in my hip and then I was medevacked back to the states and we went to Japan first and off-loaded a lot of soldiers who had been injured and they went to the hospitals there in Japan. I think we were a Yokosuka. The kid in the cot next to me, we were stacked up about four cots high in a C-141 and everybody got off in Japan except us Forrestal survivors and then we stayed aboard and continued on. The kid

in the cot next to me had had his leg amputated just an hour before the flight. He was in incredible pain. I was not.

My injuries were minor. I just was not supposed to walk on my hip and I didn't get out of the hospital and wound up in Portsmouth Naval Hospital. I didn't get out of the hospital, from the time of the accident until I got out of the hospital was a month. I could have healed up way before that.

I got orders back down to Jacksonville to Cecil Field and so I went back to Jacksonville and probably within two days the Forrestal arrived at Mayport to off-load the air wing people from 106 and VA-46. I was with Cathy King who was Gary Stark's finance and I was with Lori Barton who was Dennie's wife. Both of them were of course killed. The three of us walked aboard the flight deck after everyone got off that was going to get off in Jacksonville and we walked around the flight deck and there were all these large wooden patches on the flight deck that were repairs made in the Philippines for the transit back. It took a month to come back of course.

Then the squadron established again at Cecil Field. We, all of our A-4's that had remained were flown by five of my fellow pilots up to Japan to be part of a pool of A-4's to provide spare airplanes for the war. We were given some older model A-4B's to fly out of Cecil for nine months until we transitioned to the A-7 in 1968.

So, we flew the A-4B's around Cecil and it was light weight. It was an old airplane and it had no auto pilot. It was high-performing fun. That's one of my most enjoyable times of flying the A-4 when we were doing training missions and we had a smaller group. Some people had left to go back into combat or had orders to do other things. Mostly, they didn't get replaced because we were going to transition to the A-7 which we did and went over to VA-174 and were the first complete squadron to go transition to the A-7 as a unit.

LYN-What year was that?

DAVE-That was '68. That was spring of '68.

LYN-That building 174, the training building is still at Cecil.

DAVE-That's hangar 67 and it's still there. In VA-46 we were in the first new hangar, cantilever hangar to the north of hangar 67. Of course, all of those hangars are still there. Then we flew those A-4's there, wait a minute, when we flew the A-4's that was still over at hangar 14 to the west of the tower, the two older hangars. Then we transitioned to the A-7 that's when we went to the new hangar and we finished our training. In the summer of '69 deployed to the Mediterranean on a Med cruise on the Saratoga.

Three months into that cruise my wife Chris was, had her tickets to fly a charter over to follow the Saratoga around the Med wherever we were going to go into port next. It was going to be a

great adventure but three months into my Med cruise a message came out saying that they were going to, through a reduction in force, force a lot of people out of the Navy and my name along with two other people in my squadron, two other pilots' names were on that list. So, the list came to the ship one day and the next day we were in a COD going to Naples, Italy to be transported back to the United States and released from the U.S. Navy. So, it happened at the blink of an eye.

So as soon as I got to Italy I found a phone, I contacted Chris. I didn't even know when she was supposed to come over there. I didn't know exactly what day it was but I caught her before that flight and said, "Don't go anywhere, I'm coming back to get out of the Navy." So, I did.

LYN-What were the feelings when one day you are in the Navy and the next day you know you are being released?

DAVE-I was elated because I planned on getting out anyway but my scheduled time to get out, I had already extended for six months to fly the A-7. So, this was about three months into that. So, I was supposed to leave just a few months after that anyway. I had planned to be an airline pilot and I had already picked out the airline I wanted to fly for, it was National Air Lines in Miami. I did so because it was a one-domicile, you wouldn't be moved around the country and it was in the south and I would start as a co-pilot on the 727 because they had all professional flight engineers. So that's what happened and I went to work in Miami and Chris and I moved down there.

LYN-Let's back track and get Chris into the story. Where did Chris come from? (Laugh)

DAVE-Oh yeah. Let's go back to after we came back from Vietnam then I had an old 1941, I think it was a 1941 Higgins runabout, a plywood boat runabout with a 1954 Oldsmobile engine sitting in the middle of it. It was something I had bought after we came back. So, we were started up skiing out of the tree house where Gary Stark had lived. His boat was still there.

He had rented that apartment with Jim Baker. The two of them were there and it's on Cedar Creek in Jacksonville and the tree house was a house on stilts behind some houses, regular houses up on the road and it was a very small place that these people rented out and it was usually Navy aviators who rented this place.

We would always go there and water ski and have steak and beer and salad was the standard "tree house fare". People from that environment started what became, what initially started out was the Tree House for Steaks which later had to be changed to The Tree Steak House Restaurant which is still there today. That was started by four or five Naval aviators.

LYN-So there was one in Arlington. There's one on San Jose.

DAVE-Well, originally the first one was over close to JU on University and it was a very small restaurant that specialized in custom-cut steaks. That's the only way they did it. They would just bring a big, all the meat and you would tell them what you wanted, a rib eye or a T-bone or whatever and they would cut it right there at the table and then cook it to your desire.

One of the guys who started that was Spanky Callahan. Before the restaurant even got going he was killed in an A-4 at Navy JAX. The engine quit on short final and he didn't eject and he was killed during the impact. Brian Keller, I'm trying to think of the names of some of the guys who started that restaurant but it was real piece of Naval aviation history, guys from Cecil tied to this restaurant. They are still in business today.

LYN-So do you go to the Tree Steak House?

DAVE-We do and I usually try to inform the waiter of the history of the restaurant and they really don't care. (Laugh) They just want to know what we want.

LYN-It's a great restaurant. We all love it in Jacksonville.

DAVE-It is.

LYN-But it's just the one left.

DAVE-It's just that one, yeah. So, but the tree house was a real center part and we're back from Vietnam and we're back at the tree house and we're actually running, before I bought my boat or at about the same time, we were actually running Gary's drag boat. Gary Stark was single, and like I say he was engaged at the time to Cathy King. Cathy moved on to another life.

But a lot of those guys and the girl friends and wives or whatever started hanging out at the tree house. We would water ski and we would have standard tree house trips whenever we could because Jim Baker, Gary's roommate still lived there. I bought an old boat, called it the Nickel-Dime, and we just had a grand time until one day we were skiing, it was January 1st and we were in a neighbor's Cris-Craft, a wooden Cris-Craft. George Harold was an eighteen-year-old kid

who liked to hang out with us at the tree house. He would just come and clean up dishes just to be around.

We were in his father's Cris-Craft and it was really a nice 75-degree day. It was January the 1st and we had skied a little bit and I looked over on the shore by the tree house and there was my future wife, Chris Yirak. So, that's where we met and we married nine months later.

Chris Yirak at her marriage to Naval pilot Dave Dollarhide
Cecil Field, Florida Chapel
1968

LYN-Where did she come from? Is she from Jacksonville?

DAVE-She's from Jacksonville. Her father was an ordinance chief in the Navy, retired. At the time Chris was a hair dresser and she was Lori Barton's hair dresser which was further a tie from the Forrestal fire. Dennie's wife Lori and I were hanging out in a consoling sort of mode. So, she is the one who gave me Chris' number because Chris was her hair dresser.

LYN-Is the tree house still there?

DAVE-Still is. You can see it when you drive down Roosevelt there. You look over the bridge and you catch a glimpse of it on the north shore.

LYN-So coming from town on Roosevelt.

DAVE-If you're coming from town and just as you get across the bridge going south then you look back to the far right on the north shore of Cedar Creek and you'll see the tree house there. I don't know, it said on the side, "Tree House" in bold letters.

LYN-You didn't name it. It was already named.

DAVE-It was already there. The people who rented it named it that.

LYN-Those are great memories.

DAVE-Oh, it was such a great gathering spot especially for our squadron. We had a lot of squadron parties there. It was a place for good times.

LYN-You moved to Miami and began a new life.

DAVE-We got married nine months later and then and I started off on the Med cruise and boom, I'm back.

The Homecoming
Chris and Dave Dollarhide reunite after his final cruise

Then I just drove to Miami, walked into National Air Lines unannounced, next thing I know I was talking to the guy who does the hiring and he said "We're not hiring any co-pilots now but if we get a class going again I'll give you a call."

Al Fields was his name and so I drove up to Jacksonville and my wife and I went over to Mississippi to see my folks and by the time we got home there was telegram that said, "Come down for an interview and testing." I was the last, the first guy hired for that class of twelve co-pilots but I was the youngest guy at twenty-eight, twenty-six or seven, something like that. So, I wind up being the most junior guy on the National Air Line's pilot seniority list for three and a half years.

I went to work in October, was furloughed in January for a month. I came back and worked for one day and the next day the agents went out on strike and they closed the doors for four months. I mean closed the doors didn't carry passengers for four months. (Laugh)

Then we came back and worked a year. Well, we came back after four months and four months later they furloughed twenty of us, sixty of us co-pilots total, for a little over a year. So, boom I was out of work again. It was a really part-time job and I went in and joined the reserves at Navy JAX in VA-203, actually, right before 203 was commissioned in the summer of 1970. So, that started my reserve career and we were flying A-4L's which were modified Charlies and we flew those for three and half years and then transitioned to the A-7 in the reserves and moved to Cecil Field.

LYN-You were really at home again.

DAVE-I spend the rest of my flying career in the Navy back at Cecil Field and my last time to fly an airplane was the day before my change of command. I was the commanding officer of VA-203 and we were flying A-7B's at the time.

By this time my son David, who was twelve, was out there the day I flew my last flight when the fire truck shot me with water and they doused champagne all over me. My last flight my wingman was Bill Bailey and we are still great friends after all these years. But that was in 1982.

LYN-So during that time in the reserves, what kind of life was that?

DAVE-It was incredible. I mean there's no moving around. You know the people there were the same people. The enlisted people were the same, the pilots were the same. Some of the active duty TARS that would help staff the thing. But they had started a new concept in the Navy Reserve in 1970 called the Reserve Force Concept. Prior of that, the Navy Reserve squadrons were just a group of pilots and the enlisted people who didn't own any airplanes but just worked under the thumb of the local Naval Air Reserve Training Unit which also maintained C-118's and a variety of other reserve airplanes. But in 1970 they changed all of this because the reserves had failed during the Pueblo Mobilization because they were just not ready. They couldn't do anything.

So, they started this new concept and a lot people said it wouldn't work because it took a reservist, a part-time guy and made him the commanding officer totally in charge of all of the airplanes. We had fifteen A-4's when this first started, or sixteen A-4's. We had a large number of airplanes.

The reservist was in charge and he had an officer in charge who worked for him, an active duty reservist, but he had to coordinate with the commanding officer and so people said, "This will never work." But it worked great. It did because it turned the reserve squadrons into little ball teams all working together. They had responsibility now. They had to meet that responsibility and they did so with flying colors and became more highly qualified and proficient than any of the active duty squadrons flying out there because of experience.

LYN-So the active duty came and went and you were there.

DAVE-We were at Cecil Field. I was very sensitive to the fact that guys were leaving the Navy, instructors from VA-174 were leaving the Navy, coming over and interviewing with us in reserves like they were joining the Blue Angels. So, we just tried to stay low key because we were taking people away from active duty.

It was just a great ball-team spirit flying with VA-203 Blue Dolphins we called ourselves. We were deployed to active duty to Fallon, Nevada and we deployed to Yuma. We deployed to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico all on weapons dets to have concentrated weapons training.

You know, when I flew my last flight and Bill Bailey and I, Bill was taxiing in behind me going into Hangar, I think it is 14 which is the eastern-most of those two older hangars there. Then I look up and the whole squadron is out, all the enlisted guys are in the dungarees and everybody is out on the ramp and then I look and there is Mac McClarin. Mac McClarin was one of these first-class petty officers that had been active duty as a TAR for a long, long time. He could never pass the chief's exam but he and I had a very good friendship and appreciated each other. You know the beauty of the reserves is that you got to know people, know the names of their families and things like that. The same in the Guard.

LYN-That was what I was going to ask. How did it compare with active duty Navy? Did you still feel you were a Navy family but you…

DAVE-It probably was not as tight to the extended family as much as active duty. In active duty your husbands are all going to go to the Persian Gulf together and they are doing what you do in active duty and going through the hardships. Hardships bring people together of course. The Navy has all these programs in the squadrons, ombudsmen and people like that. Other programs that support families back home.

So, reserves are different because we're not really going to go to sea more than two weeks. We did that a lot. But we didn't have to worry about, I mean I was there like, I was gone twenty days out of every month any way for the most part.

But you're coming back home routinely after every two-day trip, three-day trip, four-day trip or whatever. But in the reserves, we were very tight because over a long period of time nobody was being ordered in and out. It was the same people you knew for all these years. Even to this day I still occasionally get together with a couple of chiefs that were in our squadron and we were in the same squadron together for twelve years. I was in that squadron for twelve years flying A-4's and A-7's.

LYN-I have noticed so far in interviews a lot of Navy people in Orange Park. It seems to me that when we were first married people were saying, "Oh yeah, they're building houses in Orange Park. Go look at Orange Park." So, Navy personnel, a lot of them did migrate and settle in Orange Park.

DAVE-Because, yes, exactly. Our neighborhood just up the road was probably forty percent Navy back in 1970. They were from Navy JAX and from Cecil.

LYN-Because of the proximity of both to Orange Park. So, let me ask you, I asked this to one other person, did you feel part of the general community of Jacksonville or did you feel part of a Navy community?

DAVE-I've got to tell you, to this day the vast majority of my friends are Navy, our friends, not that we don't have other friends, we do of course, but the vast majority of our friends are former Navy.

LYN-So that answers the question. Jacksonville is a community that is very supportive of its military community.

DAVE-It absolutely is and I got to know, I can't think of his name now but the military liaison to the City of Jacksonville at the time. Myself and Doug Burnett, I mentioned earlier who was in the Air Guard forever, and I were along with some World War II guys, I think there were four or five of us, that were recognized at a Jaguar game. So, I got to meet some people in the city who were promoting that. There have been, but everything centers, all of this centers around the fact

that I went to see the Navy recruiter at Mississippi State. [Andy Ramotnik was one of those World War II guys. His "conversation" appears later in this project]

BREAK IN TAPE

LYN-Tell us about the book.

DAVE-The book on the Forrestal fire is titled "Sailors to the End." I cannot think of the author's name but I was delighted to hear that that book was going to be published, a documentary about the Forrestal. Why do I care, because it is important to keep those things alive? I've always freely talked about it but some people can't talk about it. But I freely talked about it because I think keeping the story alive and let people understand that tragedy is healthy and also, it's worth the memory of those lost.

But, there are so many stories out there that are completely and totally inaccurate and this is my first, you know you're talking about the first experience with a story that is not exactly right. Freeman is the author's name. So, I read the book and I only really know about me and what happened to me. Well he never interviewed me but my story is in there in the book and the only thing correct is that I was there, I jumped out of my airplane, and escaped. Everything else he describes about me and what I was thinking and what I was feeling exactly what I did and what happened is completely and totally fabricated. It has nothing to do with what happened.

LYN-So you didn't recognize you.

DAVE-And I told him. I wrote him right away an email. I said, "I am so disappointed. Why would you, if this supposed to be about the truth why did you not talk to me before you tell the world what I was thinking and what I was feeling?"

LYN-Did he respond?

DAVE-In a defensive manner. But this whole thing about John McCain is ripping around now and it's about John McCain started the fire. He killed all these people. He should be, it's all political environments. The fact of the matter is no pilot in his right mind would ever try to create a malfunction on his engine while he is starting it. How insane is that? Nobody ever has done that unless it was a test pilot at Patuxent River running tests to see what would happen if you did this, that, or the other. I have no idea how you would even start a "wet start". A "wet start" creates no fire. That's a "hot start". I don't even know how you would even do that in an A-4.

Then they say, "So he could scare the airplane behind him". Our tail pipes were at sea. Nobody's tail pipe was pointed at anybody else unless they were far up the flight deck. John McCain bailed out. They even try to make him like he's on the level of the captain in making decisions and John McCain allowed these bombs to come aboard ship. He was just a pilot. He didn't know anything those bombs, like me, until he walked up to the airplane. He had no idea.

There is a video on U-Tube that somebody sent me the other day. I'm getting a lot of it because friends of mine know I was there and they want to find out. It is one hundred percent pure manufactured and it's just disgusting.

I'm not defending John McCain, I'm defending the truth when I give those people my reply.

LYN-When you left the Navy and you knew the controversy about Vietnam, can you talk to me about how you felt about what was going on? The second part, were those who left the Navy who felt that they had been criminal?

DAVE-No, no, no. I never heard that ever. I know people who left because they were traumatized but that is totally different. Like I said earlier, two of the pilots on the Forrestal turned in their wings after the fire because it was just too much for them to handle.

LYN-That would be easy to understand.

DAVE-That is easy to understand. We all take those things differently and handle them differently. But no, I don't know anybody in the attack unit, we didn't necessarily agree with the policies of McNamara and Johnson, with their politically interfering with what needed to be a military action. [2017 PSB documentary on Vietnam presents views on McNamara's and Johnson's decision concerning Vietnam that reflect the views of Dave]

If you gonna do this, let's do it. Otherwise why are we here? By them selecting targets personally within the White House it, what they wound up doing was killing thousands of Americans because of a variety of different mistakes that they made. This is real political talk going on here but I really firmly believe this that when the Vietnam War that McNamara and his whiz kids from the corporate world out there, they created this M-14 rifle problem with soldiers in the field with weapons that didn't even fire. They were just dead people waiting to die because they have a weapon that doesn't work. These bombs that were loaded aboard the Forrestal, and there were many other decisions all the way down to the F-111 airplane that was supposed to be airplane for all services.

LYN-I don't know about the 111.

DAVE-The F-111 was an airplane was built so it could be flown by the Navy and the Marines and the Air Force. It was a gigantic interceptor fighter and it was an abysmal failure because they tried to make one airplane work for all these different functions that are vastly different. Today we are seeing the same thing with the F-35.

LYN-I wondered if you were going to say that.

DAVE-Exactly. It's an over-sized, over-weight airplane that does fantastic things but now it is not the same airplane it should be for the Air Force and the Navy and the Marines. A lot of it has to do with the Marines because Marines want this jump-jet thing and because they gotta have this

airplane rising vertically or close to it. They can't just build three totally separate airplanes. The cost is prohibitive so they have to make the airplane bigger because of the Marines' desires. I'm just a lay person providing an opinion.

LYN-That's how you see it.

I don't believe that in Jacksonville, Florida that there were a lot of marches against Vietnam. I don't know of them. How would you have responded? I don't know where you were politically. I don't think you were political. I think you were doing your job.

DAVE-No there was no politics. Nobody I know of was in a political mode. You're in a pragmatic mode. We're out there doing a life-and-death stuff so you think about just being rational and the way things are done. The Forrestal fire happened because the ship short-circuited procedure. We saw the results of that. It killed so many people.

The contributing factor of that was the fact that these old World War II bombs had been used and the Mark 80 series bombs, modern bombs with thermal protection and newer bombs would have just laid there in the fire and burned and never exploded high ordinance.

LYN-So those bombs would have been how many years old? Let's think about that.

DAVE-Well, they were from World War II so in the forties.

LYN-So twenty-plus years old. This is a new story for me. I am glad to hear first-hand and am glad to put it on the record and hope others will understand.

So, you've got your retirement and they have the fire trucks with the water hose and the champagne.

DAVE-From 203, yeah.

LYN-Then what?

DAVE-Well, my son had his little instamatic camera and he was taking some photographs and then we had a great retirement party and I got roasted really hard. So, they fried me really good and it was the end, it was a sad end of twelve years of accomplishments and team-work.

It was time to move on and I've never been one to dwell on the past because there's always other things to do in life. After that I, much to my wife Chris' chagrin, I bought a motorcycle and rode with a friend out to Oregon, Washington, down to California, across the Southern United States. I did that over a year in short trips as we could do it.

That was kind of like my, I call that my second childhood. That really never stopped my flying career in the airline business ended in 2002 when I retired at age sixty and I went through the school of hard knocks in the airline business. Went to work at three different airlines between

National and Pam Am and Delta. But every bit of it had a lot of valuable parts of my life, things that I'm proud of and things that I enjoyed taking the good with the bad is what's it's all about.

So, towards the end of my last year with Delta I was very anxious to go ahead and retire. I had enjoyed it but I was tired of commuting to some other city and going through security check points all the time and jammed up in an air traffic control system and numerous delays on the ground in New York with thunder storms around while people are suffering back in the cabin and there's nothing you can do.

So, I don't miss that part but I was going to move into retirement and my recreation was Corvettes and boating but Pat Lee, my very close friend Pat Lee, convinced me that we needed to start flying some airplanes that he called RV's. (Laugh) What's an RV?

An RV is the initials of the designer of these home-built kit planes. It takes anywhere from a year and a half to like one friend took him eighteen years to finish his RV-4. It's not the easy path to build your own airplane.

I didn't build mine but I early on, I decided I would fly the RV-4 and he was building a RV-7 side by side. The RV-4 is tandem and is more like the A-4 or the A-7 and we wanted to relive that and we still do that today.

Dave Dollarhide with his RV-4
The Dreamland Squadron – "NAS Haller", Florida
2017

LYN-So it is your recreational vehicle too. You're recreating

DAVE-We're recreating only it's only got three wheels. So, we call ourselves the Dreamland Squadron and we're retired military for the most part, mostly Navy. We fly to lunch. We tail chase. We dog fight. We go fly up in the mountains and camp and get up early in the morning and drink coffee around the fire and then jump in the airplanes and go fly to the nearest point of where we can find a great breakfast. Then we fly back into the mountains.

If we've left the mountains. Sometimes we just go, there are places in the mountains out there like a dude ranch, one dude ranch we go to. So, it has been this retirement for me, I'm seventy-five so I had to retire, I was forced to retire at age sixty. So, for the past fifteen years I've been in the best time of my life and have enjoyed it immensely and I'm extremely busy doing things, things that I feel responsible to do like with the Forrestal Association. But those are good friends too. But this has been the center.

I just sponsored what I call the light-attack reunion, mostly guys from Cecil Field that flew A-4's and A-7's and we held this down at Haller Air Park at our hangar down there that we call the Dreamland Hangar or NAS Haller we call it. You'll see that tomorrow when you go down there. [interview with Dennis Gillespie was held at NAS Haller the day after this interview]

So, we also do things for the community all the time. We do formation fly-overs for functions. We never charge anybody anything. We don't believe in doing that and have no desire to do that. We think it is a worthy cause for military charity and those kind of things.

LYN-I'm just going to interject this. I wish I had known you all before. I can document the first army and the first navy of our nation that was right here at Mayport as those French defended their colony from the Spanish attack, right where the base is now. They stood along the banks and they blocked the entrance to the river with two ships. They succeeded that day but they did later perish.

We don't really have a memorial to them. On the anniversary of their deaths, the 450th anniversary, I did place a memorial out at Mayport at the ferry. I commandeered the ferry. [Jean Ribault St. Johns River Ferry] but boy would I have loved to have you all flying over that day.

DAVE-Well, that's what we do and we are mostly gratified when we are able to do a missing man formation for a fallen aviator. It's not necessarily for fallen aviators but it's fallen military man. Usually we do it because we know them personally or a friend of a friend or those kind of things. Those are the most gratifying moments. There are about ten of us totally.

LYN-That's a wonderful way to bring attention to their lives and honor their service. Thank you very much.

So, I'm going to ask about Ms. Chris. She doesn't get in the plane? She's not a flyer?

DAVE-Well, you know she has flown with me a few times, not in a long time. I do remember we were going to go down and visit more Navy friends from the reserves down at Coconut Grove and so we were invited to come down and stay with them for a few days. I started to talk about going in the airplane and just land at Tamiami and they were close by and could pick us up.

So, Chris said, "I know you love your airplane, it's just that I don't love it like you do." I said, "I understand and I'm fine with them. I'm just talking an hour and forty-five minutes versus six hours of driving." Two days later I see her and she's packing up everything in a very small suit case to go in my tiny little airplane. (Laugh) So, she will fly with me to go to see people and friends and family.

LYN-She doesn't fly herself.

DAVE-No, but my daughter is a pilot. My daughter Annie was taught by my son David who was a long-time instructor in St. Augustine and then flew for American Eagle for about five years. He had a medical problem and lost his ability to fly with them for a while and then was hired by the Aviation Authority and was with them until they had a reduction in force. Now he instructs and teaches flying still again.

When my daughter was at the University of Florida one summer, I think it was between the sophomore and junior year, they would gather up as necessary at the St. Augustine Air Port and Dave was working for Florida Aviation Career Training, FACT over there. So, he taught her how to fly. Then an FAA inspector gave her her check ride and she passed with flying colors and then I went out to be her first passenger just like I had done with David when he first learned how to fly. So, it's an aviation family to that degree. Now my daughter Ann never did keep it up.

TAPE 2 SIDE A

DAVE-My daughter Ann didn't keep up her flying. She flew for a little bit after she got her license. Life got busy for her doing other things and she didn't follow up on it. But she is still a private pilot in the eyes of the FAA.

LYN-And you said she worked for CNN.

DAVE-She works for CNN. She tells me that still to this day her gaining that pilots license was her highest sense of accomplishment she has ever had. As a professional aviator, and I have been flying for over 52 years now, what else could I give my children of more value than that? Not having forced them but offer that and they both became pilots.

Annie lives in Atlanta and works for CNN and our son David is close by here and his wife is the director of Cecil Field.

LYN-The director of Cecil Field? So, what does that mean these days? What is the director?

DAVE-She's the one in charge of Cecil Field. She runs the airport.

LYN-Oh, the airport at Cecil Field.

DAVE-The main road that comes in, everything to the east of that she is responsible for.

LYN-So is that under Jacksonville Aviation Authority?

Cecil Field Airport

DAVE-Yes.

LYN-You probably know a good bit about the questions I had. I did go to the library and get their vertical files and read newspaper articles about what people wanted to do with Cecil. I think the general population doesn't even know what's out there. So, there is an airport. The commerce park has some large businesses but there is a lot of empty space.

DAVE-It has built up quickly.

LYN-Is it? That's what I'm seeking to understand.

DAVE-Amazon is building a huge distribution center.

LYN-That will be in park or…

DAVE-It's on the northside of 103rd. [103rd Street] Just outside the airport area.

LYN-Of course the infrastructure, the roads are just unbelievable out there now.

DAVE-Yeah. They, the airport itself has about a hundred thousand plus flight operations every year. It's a very busy airport. Private jets fly in there. The Navy does a lot of training over there with the P-3's and P-8's.

Other airplanes from Navy JAX all come over to Cecil to do practice approaches and touch-downs. The Navy training command sends a carrier qualification detachment over here every couple of months and a ship is off the coast and they will fly their command with thirty-five or forty airplanes and stage out of Cecil right there at the FBO in front of the tower. The FBO being the fixed base operator which is the gas station.

LYN-I was just there and it was so quiet so I had no idea. The afternoon I was there it was so very quiet but it is beautifully maintained out there. The property is amazingly maintained.

DAVE-Yeah, they put a lot of money into the runways. Cecil has become a space, not space center, but I forget the term. But, the intention is to launch satellites from Cecil.

LYN-So that is still on-going.

DAVE-That's a done deal. That director has already been picked and he will be a co-head with Kelly [Dollarhide], both of them directors. So, "space port" is the term. That ramp is already built on the east side of the North-South runways. They will be starting that hangar out there fairly soon. It will be manned-flights of airplanes that will take rockets with small satellites as large as a grapefruit, or maybe a little bit larger than that, and they will be launched into low orbit and will serve a variety of functions. All of that is right there. There will be no unmanned launches. There will never be any rocket launches from Cecil. That is an important factor for the

public to know. It is a space port and it's on the charts. It's marked today on the sectional charts with the space port symbol. That's a unique thing.

LYN-How many space ports would there be in America would you think?

DAVE-I have no idea, maybe three. It's got to be in close proximity to a spot where they can go to launch these rockets without interfering with air traffic. So, Jacksonville is in close proximity to these warning areas just off the coast of Florida where you can't fly through without permission. So, they are sanitized areas that this can be done.

LYN-At the memorial at Cecil, there are sixteen. I was wondering if you knew any of those who had a memorial there.

DAVE-I don't. I haven't walked that walk in a long time.

LYN-I didn't know it existed until a few weeks ago. What a shame for our city to have it so hidden away. The goal is to better embrace the history of Cecil and those who served and especially those who did not come home from their mission.

So, the goal is for a thirty-acre memorial that would involve the chapel as a preservation site and then a museum. There is already an amphitheater there. The oaks have been planted as memorials. At some point to perhaps move toward the possibility of guiding this to a national memorial for POW/MIA's. So, we are just beginning this journey.

DAVE-It's a long journey. It's an optimistic journey but the support sounds really promising.

LYN-I will just mention I received a copy of the letter from Congressman Al Lawson who is actually from my home town of Quincy and then from Senator Marco Rubio and we know that John McCain has endorsed this project. We will see if endorsing on a letter leads to our city leaders wanting to endorse. This land which was given to the City of Jacksonville. It's an enormous part of the westside.

I want to thank you for your service. Thank you for being able to tell the story from someone who was there at such a traumatic incident that has been spoken over for so many years.

DAVE-It is my pleasure.

CONTINUED

LYN-We are talking about the fly-overs by these wonderful people and how they honor fallen military. Dave is going to explain to me how they do that.

DAVE-Well, you mentioned that the fly-overs are a special moment for these ceremonies especially so for funerals and such where we will do a "missing man formation", and there is so much emotion to begin with. But usually, if you are on the ground you know the emotion really

rises when the airplanes fly over for your loved one. So, there is seldom a dry eye in the house and it's a great tribute for a fallen military person. We enjoy doing that.

The critical part of this is the timing. So sometimes it's hard to get somebody to coordinate and tell us exactly when they want us over. They don't understand we need to know exactly to the minute, to the second, when you want us to be there. We can be there plus or minus ten seconds and be that accurate because of GPS. It's much more tricky that just having a GPS. You have to make the airplane do what you want it to do and it depends on the wind and all these other things that are around you.

If we, sometimes it doesn't matter. The last fly-over we did was the missing man formation at the National Cemetery. They said. "If you come by within five minutes of this time you are fine." We did that. But we were more like ten minutes off because of what actually happened on the ground. But it still worked for them.

We have to coordinate with the tower because it's close in to the International Airport. The towers around the International Airport or Cecil or Craig or the Naval Air Station, to make a fly-over at the cemetery here by the Orange Park Mall, that's inside the Navy JAX air space so we have to coordinate with them.

They always accommodate us for these things. If we can be there at the very end of the national anthem, if that's when they want us by, that's when it's mostly emotional. Last year, one year to this month actually, I quit flying a Navy A-4 attack jet at air shows. I flew that airplane for three and a half years which was an incredible feel. I started flying the airplane at age seventy and stopped last year as I turned seventy-four on that exact same week-end at the air show down in Titusville.

I did, one of the most interesting things I did in flying that airplane was to make a fly-by at the University of Central Florida at a night ball game. I hadn't flown at night in a long time. This airplane, since it was restored, it took seven or eight years to restore this airplane and a lot of money. But it had not flown at night so we made sure we checked out the lights. Everything worked, the lights inside worked, it all worked fine. I launched off and I had my IPAD on my knee and I'm up there in a totally dark sky and all I could see were the lights of some towers that were above my altitude and holding off to the east of the campus, the stadium, and I had an exact time to come over and there was one of the assistant athletic coaches who was at the top of the stadium with a hand-held radio so I could talk to him.

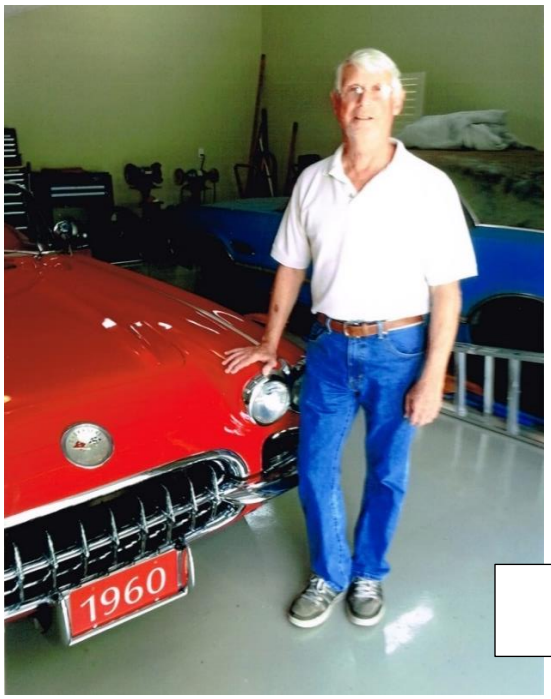
I started to work my way in on a little one-minute leg course, about three or four minutes worth of route for me to get there, and I had a turn in there so I could cut it short or widen it if I needed to adjust the time because even though you had the GPS there's still a certain amount of skill and wag going on there. So, I couldn't come across high speed because I still had to comply with normal regulations, FAA regulations. So, my maximum speed is 250 knots. I told them, "When I come by I'll put all the lights on bright and flash and I'll put the speed brakes out and then go to

full power just over the stadium so you can hear the roar of the airplane and then you'll see me coming over."

So, as I'm setting up all of a sudden, the little blue dot on my IPAD which shows where I am on the map and the route I'm flying disappears. It meant that I don't know exactly where I am right now and I've got to have this IPAD with the route on this program that I use to show me, we're timing this with thirty thousand people of whatever at the stadium waiting on me to come by at the right second. I am in a panic. I get about two circles out there and finally it comes back and I think "Oh my God, OK I'm kinda headed in the right direction." I look down and it's gone again. Then it came back so I had this panic attack going on with the navigation.

I can see the lights of the stadium over there about ten miles away. Then as I proceeded in-bound the timing was looking pretty good and then I'm talking to the athletic director and then as I started to approach the stadium he says, "Go ahead and do it now" and then he left the mike button pressed so I was listening to the crowds scream as the national anthem was playing so I was filled in the cockpit with the reality of what was going on down there. I heard them holding the last note of the national anthem for just a couple of seconds then as I came right over the top of the stadium.

My niece was with her husband in the stands and they were able to take an IPHONE video of it. Just to typify how important the timing is of these fly-overs. Any other time in that situation it wouldn't have worked as well.



"Hide" with his '60 Corvette