MH: This is Monty Alan Hostetler; it is 2:15 on February 8th 1990. I am
interviewing for the first time Captain David Edward Emery. This interview is taking
place at his office.

DE: Howard.

MH: Howard? O.K. I am sorry, I am interviewing Captain David Howard Emery
at his office. This is to take part in the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project at Texas
Tech University. Sir, this first question I have is just a general question. When did you
serve in the Vietnam conflict, and where were you located at?

DE: I went to Korat Air Base Thailand. Korat Royal Thai Air Base Thailand. I
arrived there on New Years Eve on 1972. And I served there at Korat until December the

MH: How did you, did you enlist in the service voluntarily, or were you drafted?

DE: I did volunteer to join the Air Force. When I graduated from high school the
lottery was in effect. But I wasn't really concerned about that; I enlisted before my
number came up, before I was ever called. I wanted to experience the world, get away
from home, have job skills, things like that. So in October of ’69, after I graduated in June
’69, I joined the Air Force.

MH: What was your specific job at Korat Air Base?
DE: Well I was an aircraft maintenance technician. I had served first, after basic and tech school, at Craig Air Force Base in Selma, Alabama for about two and a half years. So I went to Korat as an aircraft maintenance technician working on the RF-4 or the F-4E. I had originally been sent there to work on the EB-66, but as I arrived there, they were phasing those out. And asked me which plane I would like to work on, so I asked to work on the F-4E.

MH: And so, approximately, how long was your training before you actually went to Korat?

DE: Well, all the training together, you have to understand. Tech school, which is just a basic aircraft maintenance tech school, was about a, I think it was a 13 week course, that I had in the winter and spring of 1970. Then I went to work on the T-37's, of course, you constantly get OJT training, and CDC courses, that you learn more and more about aircraft. I went to school at Shaw Air Force Base in Sumter South Carolina, for work on the B-66. So I did have, I think that was 5 or 6 weeks of training, specifically on the B-66. When I got to Korat, they put me to work right away on the F-4E. And later on, several months after I actually started, they brought a field training detachment instructor in from another base, and conducted classes for those of us who had not been specifically trained on the F-4. So it was kind of after the fact training.

MH: Before you had gone to Thailand, did you, were you given any training by the Air Force in terms of Vietnamese customs or religions?

DE: No, no, no. Actually not, of course Vietnam and Thailand have very much different customs and backgrounds. They share somewhat in religions. But no, I had not been given anything in particular. I took it upon myself to go to the library and look some things up about Thailand, to see where Korat was on the map, and to know just a little bit as to what to expect. But the Air Force did not give me any training. Now you have to understand in ’71, ’72 a lot of guys I was working with had come back from Southeast Asia, some from Vietnam, some from Thailand. So a lot of what I learned about what to expect came from guys who had already been over there.

MH: So mainly word of mouth talk?

DE: Right, but nothing formal from the military.
MH: What was Korat Air base, Royal Thai Air Base, like when you first got there?

DE: Well, the first thing I noticed right away was the warmth and humidity. It was very, very hot. I had gone from Alabama to North Dakota to drop my wife off there, with her parents while I was in Thailand, and this was of course December, and it was bitterly cold in North Dakota, and when I got to Thailand, two days, three days later after stopping over in the Philippines for a day or so. I was just kind of overwhelmed by the heat. Korat had been established quite a while before that, the base was fully developed, it wasn’t a tent city or anything like that. They had an in place Base Exchange, that was in a cement block, and bricked building, air-conditioned. I lived on the third floor of an air-conditioned dormitory. Some of the fellows lived in the older dorms, which were two stories high, and still had screens on the windows. They had to sleep under mosquito nets but because of the air-conditioning it was like living in a motel back in the states here. It was not bad at all.

MH: It took you about two or three days to get over from North Dakota over to Korat?

DE: Well, seems like I left on the 27th it must have been from North Dakota, and I had to go to California. I left in the morning from North Dakota, and went to California probably into San Francisco. I landed in San Francisco and took a bus up to Travis AFB, got on a chartered airline called the Flying Tiger Lines. Most of the guys who had been to Southeast Asia, if they didn't fly on a military flight, flew the old contract Flying Tiger. Stretch 707's I think they were. Held about 318 people. We flew first to Elmendorf, Alaska, and stopped there for fuel, spent an hour or so there. We got to get out of the plane, walk around; we weren't allowed to leave the airport, of course. And we flew from there to seems like it was Okinawa. And again it was just for a fuel stop. They let us out of the plane long enough to go to the rest room, buy souvenirs anything like that. Then we flew from there on into the Philippines, Clark Air Base. That was just one long blurred day, it was really more than a day, but it seemed like a day. The biggest shock, weather wise, was getting out of the plane in the Philippines during the day, during the heat of the day. And they put us right away in a corrugated steel building at the airport at Korat. It was extremely hot, there were armed guards at the doors, because some of us
were going on to Thailand, some were staying in the Philippines, and some were going to Vietnam. And they didn’t want to take any chances of anyone getting away, so believe it or not. So there were armed guards at the doors, and we were not allowed to leave, not even to go to the bathroom unless we were escorted. There were families in there of people that were coming to the Philippines accompanied. There were quite a few of us that were unaccompanied.

MH: Back at Korat, how were conditions among the personnel assigned there? Were they, was the morale high or was it low?

DE: Oh, well, that's kind of a general statement. You have to understand, there was a totally different attitude from a stateside base, to a wartime overseas base in Southeast Asia. Now I can only speak from my experience in Thailand, however I did talk to fellows that had come from Vietnam, and they had told me that the same was pretty much in evidence there. In the states we had been trained, and because I was at the time a buck sergeant, a young guy, three years in the service. We had been trained and trained and trained in the states to follow tech orders, to obey the rules, to do this and do that, everything has to be just right, by the book. And it seems like, when we got off the plane over there, the book was just thrown away, the tech order was used only as a knee rest so you wouldn't get grease on your knees while you were working underneath the airplane. Which is kind of a sad commentary. Morale though, I don’t know if it increased morale or decreased morale, guys don't always like to follow the tech orders, so it was probably a little increase in morale that they weren't shackled to the rules and regulations they had in the states. However, they, of course, should have followed the tech data. Probably the biggest thing I saw by way of morale, and this is a little story that you may find humorous. On the plane on the way over was very crowded, and you talk to the people near you because it was a 13 hour flight from the time we left Travis to the time we got off in the Philippines. And I didn't finish telling you but we laid over for a day and a half in the Philippines, and then we flew into Korat on a 141 by way of Saigon. So I did stop momentarily in Vietnam. On the plane on the way in, I remember very distinctly, there were these two older guys, tech sergeants, master sergeants it was there last year or two of service, and on the plane in they were talking about, ‘Oh man why did they have to send us here, we were so close to retirement, and why are old guys like us coming over
here, and you know they should send these young guys that really want to come, and we have families back in the states, oh moan, moan, moan.’ And you almost feel sorry for these guys. Of course I was young, and I wanted to see a different part of the world. These guys got off of the airplane, and it was like someone had shot them full of the serum from the fountain of youth. And they just went, ‘All right, let's party.’ And I remember these two guys distinctly, I'd seen them throughout the year a number of times, as I would get on a bus to go downtown or whatever. These guys would have their, again it is another thing I have to explain, their little cloth or leather, or naughahide whiskey bottle container that they had specially made up with their name, and patches and all that on it. They had their little container on their belt with their little fifth of whiskey in it. Heading down town to their girlfriends’ bungalow to shack up with their ti-loc, which means girlfriend. And it was like they were teenagers; they were totally rejuvenated. And then a year later, these same guys as I was leaving, I saw again, and it was like, ‘Oh man, I am ready to retire, it's time to go back to the states.’ And it just struck me as being very funny. So in talking about morale, for some folks, they complained about going to Thailand, but when they got there it was like, ‘Hey, let's party.’ And they just reverted to their teenage years, they ran the hookers hard, they drank themselves blind constantly, and somehow managed to survive and do their jobs. Really interesting phenomenon.

MH: You were mentioning they drank a lot. Did drinking ever, do you feel, ever affect many people's duties or was it just a problem among a few people?

DE: No, to say that drinking was a problem there is really an understatement, and a little ignorance of what the real problem was. Drinking was rampant, I mean it was just assumed that you were going to drink yourself blind every chance you got. And it was accepted. It was expected. Drugs were the thing that just totally shocked me. I had come from a background where I had not been exposed to drugs, growing up in Western Pennsylvania. A rather naive childhood I guess you'd say. I had been exposed, just once or twice to people using drugs, or handling drugs, mainly marijuana when I was at Craig Air Force Base. But in Thailand, it was not uncommon to see guys openly, on the flight line, in a revetment, with a loaded, fueled, I’m talking 24,000 pounds of high explosive bombs, an F-4 fully fueled, leaking it on the ramp. Sitting on the wing just toking away. It was just not unusual. The joke was that the expediter, on the midnight shift, could drive
by the revetments, after all the maintenance and loading was done, all the lights were out. You would turn your lights out to keep the bugs away. But he could tell who was in the revetment with the aircraft, by of the glow the marijuana cigarette on the wing. And it wasn't totally true, because not everyone smoked. But it was very rampant, I could talk for a while about this, just to give you a few examples of how bad it was. I told you I lived on the third floor of this air-conditioned dorm. I lived in a cubicle, which was not a room, it just had partitions to make a room with, at one time, two other guys. And we had two double bunk beds. And when I first got there, of course the new guy gets the top bunk, so I was on the top bunk, and we had maybe ten foot ceilings. It was not unusual at night to have a blue cloud hanging two feet from the ceiling, from marijuana smoke. On one occasion, the first sergeant came into the dormitory, to do his first sergeants inspection, and he reached underneath a dresser in one of the rooms, and pulled out the wash girl’s wash basin, now the wash girls...in every dorm there were mamasons that came in that we paid two or three dollars a month to do all of our laundry, shine all our shoes. And then there were the house boys, that made the beds, cleaned the rooms, and they would also sometimes shine shoes. But the mamason’s wash basin was a very large aluminum pan, almost like a wok that you would cook Chinese food in. And it would hold, if you poured it full of water, I would say five to seven gallons of water. It was a big thing. Well, they pulled this mamason’s washbasin out from under the dresser, because the edge of it was kind of hanging out. And it had, oh I would say several pounds of marijuana laying loose in the bottom of it. And I heard this conversation. The first sergeant said, ‘Oh, I wonder what that is? Hah-ha,’ and pushed it back underneath the dresser. We used to receive frequent briefings about the problems of using drugs, marijuana, pills. A lot of pills were being used over there, speed, uppers, downers, you know, different colors, things like that. And we were encouraged very much to not tolerate it, to not put up with it, to report those people that were using drugs in our midst. But it was a dangerous proposition to do that because the use of drugs was so rampant that you just did not know who to trust. As an example, one of our master sergeants gave a briefing, and this guy was a very heavy drinker, and everyone knew it, but again that was very common. But he gave this briefing one day to the flight before we went on duty. And he said, ‘I will not tolerate drugs, the commander will not tolerate drugs. If you
know anybody using drugs turn them in. I will support you 100%. The commander will support you 100%. You need to not tolerate this.’ Well, I happened to be on a midnight shift a while later, it was a short while later, and we got like an hour and a half breakfast break, where we could go eat breakfast at the chow hall for midnight chow, or we could go to our rooms and sleep. Do whatever we wanted, as long as we were back to work in an hour and a half. And I went to the dorm, and on the third floor balcony of what would be the outside entry way, or you might call it a fire escape, there were ten or twelve guys having a marijuana party. They were smoking, and loud, and boisterous, and had this mama-san’s wash basin full of marijuana sitting just at their feet. And I went into my little cubicle there, and the smoke was hanging in the air very heavily, and I just said, ‘That's it.’ So I went back to work. I went down to the flight line, and I called the security police dispatcher. And I said, ‘I would like to report an ongoing, right now, active marijuana party on the third floor fire exit landing of barracks such and such.’ And he said, ‘Yeah right, well, what's your name?’ And I said, ‘My name's not important but I'd like you to send some police cars, maybe some drug dogs over there. I'm telling you right now there are ten or twelve guys just sitting out there with several pounds of marijuana, actively engaged in a marijuana party.’ ‘Yeah right, well, you know, by the time we get some police over there, and they see the cars coming, they'd be gone, we couldn't find any evidence. So you know man it's like you know. What could we do? What's your name? I got to know what your name is to make a report.’ And I said, ‘No, no, no. You don't understand. I'm not going to give you my name, but I'll tell you what. I know who you are because it happens to be 1:33 in the morning, and you are the dispatcher. Now if you don't have some police here in about five minutes, I will call your commander tomorrow.’ And of course I was on the flight line, so I wasn't able to sit there and watch. But I do know that they did show up. I suspect he called them first, and said ‘Hey, bust it up. We are sending some cars over.’ Because no one was caught, and there were rumors going around about hey watch out, there are people in here reporting this, so on and so forth. And for a couple of weeks it was kind of low key, there wasn't a lot of smoking and things like that. But you had to be very careful. When I went that night to talk to that sergeant who had said ‘We'll support you, we'll support you’ I tried to tell him that a couple of guys I knew in particular were really, they were pushing me to use
drugs. He just went crazy. ‘I don't want to hear it, don't tell me that. Oh man if they find
out that you are trying to turn them in, they'll kill both of us.’ And it was 180 degrees out
of what he had said, ‘I’ll support you 100%.’ And it showed the two faced thing. So, when
you ask what was the morale, I can give you from my point of view. It was very
disheartening for me to go over there and see blatant abuse of alcohol, blatant abuse and
toleration of drugs. And a very two faced attitude by the, those in power, and those that
were using drugs. I had friends, a guy I had gone to 66 tech school with that OD'ed, he
and two other guys. One guy that worked on planes right next to me, OD'ed with another
fellow in a bungalow downtown and they had been passed out for over twenty four hours
and they didn't show up for work and no one said anything for one shift. Second shift
they didn't come back to work, and the boss said, ‘Look, if someone knows where they
live, go check on them.’ And they got them to the hospital, they say, within hours of them
dying of drug overdose. One guy was a staff with a line number for tech doing this. And I
saw him, that was in ‘73, I saw him in ’81 at Nellis Air Force Base, when I was a second
lieutenant. He was still a staff sergeant. So that's a little bit about what goes on.
Generally, the morale was good in that guys liked being over there and being in a
different country, fighting the war, you know, loading airplanes with real bombs and
bullets. And of course the guys running the chicks real hard, using the booze and the
drugs. But then, a certain thing about being away from home. A lot of guys were married
and missed their wives even though they were downtown running at the same time. So it
was kind of mixed feelings of morale.

MH: You had said that you had a roommate in this room, about how big was this
room?
DE: The room, we are sitting in a room now that's about maybe 10 by 12. That's
about the size of our cubicle, maybe it was that big. I would say 10 by 10 and we had in
there two double bunks, one desk and chair and four wall lockers.
MH: The bathroom was down the hall?
DE: It was a communal latrine, no door. Just partitions with an open doorway. We
had a like a curtain over our doorway, and the partitions were maybe six feet high.
MH: Approximately, if you know, how many people were at Korat?
DE: Oh, I don't. I have to guess. Several thousand people. We had F-4E's, for a time we had F-4Cs. We had A-7D's, we had F-105s Wild Weasels, we had EB-66's C's and E's, and we had I think it was an EC-121. Called it the AB triple C, Airborne Command Control Center. The old Super Constellations. Plus all the support people. Several thousands.

MH: Since you were serving as enlisted at the time, what, how do you feel NCO Officer relations were, especially with the drug problem there was? Did the officers or pilots trust the NCO's to work on the aircraft? Did they have a choice?

DE: They didn't have a choice. They did. I would suspect that, I don't know. My relationship with some of the guys was probably a little different because I don't drink, I wasn't doing the drugs. So I would talk to the pilots. They were very concerned about their aircraft. They took it very seriously. But I think their fear of flying over enemy territory on missions probably outweighed their fear that maybe this guy down here didn't torque a nut tight enough, or the safety wire isn't right, you know exactly the way it should be, or maybe it's a quart low on oil or something like that. I never really heard a pilot express a fear that his aircraft may be getting less than adequate maintenance due to the drug problem. The relationships, now you asked about relationships. Normally there was a very friendly relationship between the crew chiefs and the pilots. And I think that is something the pilots tried to instill. You don't want to upset the guy that's fixing your airplane, especially if he might be using drugs. So they would always joke with us, and carry on, and have a good time. I played on the flag football team. We would often play against the pilot squadron, and it was always fun to go out and try and whoop up on the pilots. I would say generally the relationship was good. Off-duty, except for like sports and things like that it was pretty standoffish. They had their club, they had their bungalows, they had their area where they stayed. But if you saw a pilot on the base, in the BX, riding his bike along or something, it was always, ‘Hey Chief’, and ‘Hey Sir, How you doing?’

MH: What kind of activities were there to do other than drugs and alcohol off-duty...

DE: And women.

MH: ...and women? And were they actively participated in?
DE: Yeah, tours were real big. They had bus tours all the time. It was a couple
hour drive by bus down to Bangkok, which was the capital of course and guys would go
down there all the time, just to see the sites. There were a number of temples, shrines, and
Buddhas all over the place that you could see. They had museums and reptile zoos you
could see big crocodiles things like that. Pattaya Beach which was several hours below
Bangkok, which was called the Riviera of Thailand. It is a big resort area where you can
do snorkeling, scuba diving, you know just swimming on the beach. A lot of, probably a
lot more western women would be there. A lot of Australian girls or girls from European
type countries were down there, so the guys would go down to Pattaya Beach. And they
were always tours of the various provinces. Chiang-Mi was a favorite province which is
up north near the Burmese border. Chiang-Mi is known as the province of the beautiful
women because they are intermarried with the Burmese, the Chinese, and the Thais. You
could normally, like if you were walking down a street in Korat, you could see a girl that
looked different. She looked Thai, but she looked really different. Very, very attractive.
Different features than the other Thais, and if she spoke any English and you asked her,
‘Are you Chiang Mi?’ They would almost always say, ‘Yeah, yeah.’ And the others
envied the beautiful women from Chiang-Mi. It was a great honor to have the look of a
Chiang-Mi. So tours, things like that would probably be the biggest thing. Downtown
shopping, and of course running the bars, the guys would run the bars. Shopping was
great, buying shoes, the custom made shoes, custom made suits and clothes, everybody
had a full wardrobe of custom made clothes. And of course the souvenirs the monkey pod
wooden bowls, things to send back to your family.

MH: Did you, what was their policy at the time for R and R?

DE: Oh we got a couple of weeks of R and R. You could take up to thirty days
leave if you wanted to. I took, well I did take emergency leave while I was there, my wife
had a baby six months after I had gone, so I went home a week after the baby was born,
and stayed there a month. But on top of that I did also get a week of R and R. And it
depended on how much they could let you go, you know, how much they could allow to
let you go. So, I went down to Bangkok for I think it was four or five days. Me and
another guy got a room in a hotel and hired a taxi driver for two bottles of whiskey. Two
bottles of whiskey, and he stayed with us. Anytime we wanted him, for five days, he took
us anywhere we wanted to go. Kept score for us bowling, translated for us in the
restaurants, advised us what to get, what food not to get, took us to a reptile farm. The
whole deal for two bottles of whiskey, and he told us what kind of whiskey to get. He cut
it down probably about twenty times and sold it and made a tremendous profit off it.

MH: Let me turn this tape over before it runs out on us. He said, ‘Once you get
them going just let them go.’ We were just talking about your R and R. What, you took
your one week down to Bangkok. I know in some of the active, Vietnamese places they
had trouble with the Vietnamese people. Were the Thai people at all hostile toward you,
or distrusting of the Americans taking advantage of the situation?

DE: That brings to mind a very funny story, at least funny to me. It was probably
what you would call a dichotomy. O.K? We helped their economy very much, wherever
the Americans were the economy flourished. However, where the Americans were, there
was the corruption of Western society. The women wore the American or the Western
dress very much whether they married or just were shacking with or just being prostitutes
for the Americans. It helped break up their families somewhat. Caused crime to rise
wherever Americans were because there was a larger influx of money. And you'd have,
you would have some that would just tell you, ‘We like Americans. Americans are good
people, they bring in money, they help the economy. We don't mind Americans.’ Then
you have other occasions like the day I was walking downtown early on a weekend
morning. If you go early, you see the people as they are naturally. If you go downtown in
the late afternoons or evenings they are all out in their western dress trying to get you to
come in the bars and things like that. But if you go down early in the mornings, normally
you don't see many Americans, and if you go down to the shopping areas downtown,
away from the bars and such, you'll see the people in the traditional dress, just doing what
they do. So I was downtown one time, way downtown, near Lady Mo Square. Lady Mo
is another story, but she was the wife of one of the early kings, and she is credited for
saving the country from Laotian invaders while the men were away fighting in Laos. But
she is very highly revered there, and people would bow down to her as they'd pass by
Lady Mo statue. So I was coming into Lady Mo Square, which is a big circular area
O.K? Where the cars would drive around the outside and several roads converged on this
big area. And there were thousands of people, which was really unusual. There was no
traffic moving there were so many people. And there were some young, I would take it to be college students, standing on the base of the statue, talking extremely fast and angrily. Well, I understood a little bit of Thai, very little bit. But after a while, here I am six foot two standing in the middle of a couple thousand Thais, who, most of them are no more than five foot two. I kind of stood out, and I'm listening, and I'm watching, and people would occasionally glance over at me and have various looks on their faces. So after a couple of minutes of just standing there, and I'm up in the crowd, not on the edge of the crowd, I'm in the crowd... the one guy with the megaphone started chanting and got the crowd to chant ‘Mai di pharong. Mai di pharong.’ Well, roughly translated ‘Mai di pharong’ means ‘No good foreigners’ and it normally is associated with Americans. I was standing six foot two plus in the middle of Anti-American rally. And when they started this chant, everyone around me...it rippled, of course, through the crowd. And I'm looking around, and thousands of pairs of little Asian eyes looked up at me. And I just kind of said ‘Yo’ and backpedaled out of there and grabbed the first samlar driver- the little peddle bicycle with the seat in the front- that I saw, and I hopped on the front, and I said, ‘Lao Lao kup’ which means ‘Get me out of here fast mister.’ And I threw like twice the normal fee at him, this guy couldn't have weighed more than a hundred pounds, and I weighed almost two hundred. He was hopping on those pedals for all he was worth. And I got out of Lady Mo Square real fast. No problem. While I was there, as a matter of fact, the day... the week, the week after I left. I went to a going away little party down at the American hotel in Korat. It was really just a couple of guys that were going away. I left about three weeks before I was supposed to. So this was just a couple of nights before I left, not knowing I was going to leave. So I was down there for some friends, and I left actually on the 7th of December, so this was probably on about the 4th or 5th of December '73. And it seems like it was the next week, maybe the 11th or 12th of December, a bomb took the front of the American restaurant out, and it was aimed at the Americans that went to the restaurant, the bar, and lived in the hotel. So... I don't remember if anybody was killed, I know the building was severely damaged. So yes, some people liked us, some people didn't like us. When you pulled out a lot of money most people liked you. So it was mixed feelings.

MH: On the base itself were there any racial problems?
DE: Yes. Again you have to remember when this was, it was 1972. Race relations in the military at this time were touchy. Just before this, several years before this it seems like it was either in the late 60's maybe just before I came in or just after I came in. Somewhere down around here in Southwest Texas or New Mexico, somewhere, a group of blacks, who were honestly being mistreated, treated as second class citizens in the military, which was a hold over from World War II and the Korean War, took over and barricaded themselves and had a sit in, in a dining hall in one of the military bases. And I'm not sure if it was Air Force or Army. It was a big thing. They, of course, the military police surrounded it with guns and it was like a Mexican standoff for a while. And they were demanding equal rights, they were demanding equal promotions, they were demanding better jobs, instead of the more menial labor type jobs in the military, they wanted some of the advanced specialties and things like that. And they, for the most part, got that. So when I was going through tech schools and all, there were blacks with me going through aircraft maintenance tech school and so on and so forth. So it must have been just before I came in when this happened, maybe in '68. So there was this new freedom, especially among the blacks, this new freedom. And it really kind of, I think, went the full swing of the pendulum the other way, too far. So about this time, in '73, we were told, and everyone had to go to these social actions briefings and classes to teach you the cultural backgrounds of other people, not just blacks. They tried to teach us the cultural background of the blacks, the Asian Americans, which were not so common then, the American Indians, which were not very common, and some of the other minorities we might come in contact with in the military, but mainly the blacks. And one thing we were told was that they had certain rights and rituals that if they were engaged in these things we, whites, should not make fun of them, should not intimidate them, should not try to break them up or anything like that. One of these, and again I think it was a backlash of the blacks toward the whites. One of these things that they did was called 'the Dap.' I don't know if you have ever heard of the thing called 'the Dap' or not. You will see occasionally now two black guys meet each other, and they'll kind of do not a normal handshake, they'll kind of tap their hands together or something like that and then start talking. Well, ‘the Dap’ was a grossly exaggerated form of greeting and I’m not sure it really had anything to do with ancient African traditions or tribal rituals or anything. But
they developed it and said that this was their heritage, and this was something cultural to
them. And what would happen is they, two black guys, would come up to each other, let's
say in the line in the dining hall. O.K? Very touchy thing, you don't like fooling, people
don't like you fooling with their food or their time to eat. Well these guys would stand in
the line and block the very narrow line we had to go through, and they would do the Dap
and greet each other. And it would consist of slapping the hands, both sides, tapping the
knuckles, doing various things, even sometimes bumping elbows. And seriously, a ‘Dap’
could go on for two or three minutes. And we were told that it was just not polite, it was
not expected, and we would be greatly offending our fellow black airmen if we were to
go around them, to walk between them, to say ‘Excuse me’, to laugh at them, to say
‘Knock it off, I want to eat.’ As a matter of fact, we probably would have been mugged if
we had done it. So we were to passively stand by and wait for two or three minutes for
these guys to finish their ‘Dap’. Well, normally, when two guys were there, then another
guy maybe a little further ahead in the line would see them, and he would walk back, and
he would get in. And it was not unusual for ten minutes to stand in line and wait for these
guys to finish ‘Dapping’ and greeting each other. Did that cause hard feelings? You'd
better believe it. You better believe it. And like I say, it was a backlash, it was a swing of
the pendulum completely the other way. Much resentment. Very much resentment.
Blacks ran in very tight groups downtown. They had certain bars that they went to,
certain girlfriends that they had. Very cliquish. I never saw any real confrontations. But
the tension was definitely there.
MH: Did it ever, do you think it ever affected job performance, like one black
man on a maintenance crew working on an aircraft. Did it create tension there? Or did they
make all the maintenance crews all black or all white?
DE: No, no, no. Normally your maintenance crews, you had a crew chief and an
assistant crew chief. The crew chief worked one twelve hour shift, the assistant worked
another twelve hour shift. Normally you did not work very closely with another person
unless a specialist came to the airplane. A sheet metal guy, a hydraulics guy, electrics
guy, whatever. So personally I did not have to work very, very closely with anyone. My
plane was in a revetment, I would work with the expeditor, or go to the next revetment to
borrow tools. Surprisingly, on duty, people acted very professionally as far as doing their
job. They knew what they had to do, they went out, they put in their twelve hours, they
did their job. You have your slackers of course all the time. But it did not appear to be a
big problem on duty. It was the off duty thing, in the recreational activities, in the chow
halls, things like that where you could feel it in the air.

MH: With the housing, I assume it was intermixed just to avoid anybody claiming
they were racially segregated. Or did they tend to cliquish off by themselves?

DE: Well, I'm trying to think about that. You were assigned a bunk, of course, as
soon as one was open in a dorm. And I know that guys moved around, so it seems to me
like, and this is, I'm really trying to pull from the far reaches of my memory here that
more than likely black guys as soon as a bed would come open. Like if there were two
black guys together, and there was a white guy put in with them, they would probably tell
him, ‘Hey look, we have a black brother that we would like to move in here. He is in a
room with a couple of white guys, why don't you two just switch.’ I really cannot
remember any bunking situations where they were really mixed. There may have been,
I’m sure there were, but I don't remember them. And again there were a lot of dormitories
on the base that were open bay. Where you had a locker, and you had a bed with a
mosquito net, and there were no walls between you and your neighbors.

MH: How did the, being in the Air Force, and working with the equipment, do
you feel some of the equipment was a little too complicated for the type of situation? For
the weather? Did it affect the equipment, things like that?

DE: Oh I don't think so, we were working, at the time you have understand the F-4
was top of the line fighter in the inventory. The equipment we had was adequate, but
not too complicated. Again as a crew chief, my tools were screw drivers, and wrenches
and things like that. We had power equipment, hydraulic power carts, electric power
carts, that they trained us to work on. No, it wasn't high tech, highly sophisticated
computerized equipment like that. The weather, because it was so wet, over the long
term, it caused corrosion problems on the aircraft. For a one year tour, normally that is
not something that we would have to be concerned with. We had a schedule that we had
to wash the aircraft on, with an anti-corrosive type of wash. Because they would build up
like mold and things like that in the joints that would cause rust, rivets and things to get
corroded. But other than just washing more frequently than we would in a dry arid
climate. I can't think ...It rained a lot during monsoons. It stopped work sometimes
because it washed tool boxes away it would rain so hard, but it didn't affect the
equipment.

MH: Was the Air Force Base just merely have Air Force personnel, or was there
an Army unit assigned for security?

DE: There were Thai military assigned there because it was a Thai base. O.K?
And it seems like they had mainly just like a police force there, a military police force
on the base. There were some Army, you see Korat butted up against Camp Friendship,
which was an Army base. When I got there Camp Friendship had like a caretaker crew of
Army people. It was essentially shut down. They had, their swimming pool was open,
they had a little BX that was open. But they didn't have thousands of Army. There were
empty barracks and empty administrative buildings. I'm not sure what it was used for
before. Bob Hope had come to Camp Friendship at one time, when it was full of Army
guys. So Korat and Friendship together had a big Bob Hope get together. But that was
before. There were, but not many. It was mainly Air Force.

MH: Since it was a Thai base, was it just the Thai security force there, or were
there actual Thai Air Force also there, with a detachment of aircraft?

DE: Yeah, they had, up at the other end of the flight line they had some
helicopters. So there was a Thai end of the base, and they had like a transient alert where
they would handle other Thai aircraft that would come in. But the only ones, it seems to
me like the only ones they had permanently stationed there were helicopters.

MH: The Thai forces and the American forces were pretty much segregated?

DE: For the most part yeah.

MH: Was there an actual physical barricade there?

DE: No, no, no. No, no. You could get on a little warehouse tug and drive right
down to the Thai end of the base. And there were, we had three F-4's that had been hit by
a C-121. As it was taxiing out the wing tip took the tails off of three F-4's. It was kind of
funny. But the Thai's had some empty hangers and they allowed us to put those aircraft in
those hangers until we got all the parts in to repair them. And so it was down at the other
end of the base, and you could just drive down there on the access road.
MH: Was there ever any problems with the security of the base? Was it pretty lax?
DE: Oh no. No, no, no. Security was very tight. You almost always had to show your I.D. coming on and off the base. If you were on a bus, the bus would stop, a Thai and an American would come in. There was always a Thai and an American at the gates. A Thai and American, fully armed, would come on to the bus and check every I.D. card. If you couldn't pull your card out because you were too drunk or whatever you were off the bus until someone could come identify you, and sign you on. Korat was, I think, at least while I was there, and I think it continued that way, was the only base in Thailand that had never had a sapper attack. So there were Thai Cong just as there were Viet Cong. And I know that Nakhon Phanom, Takli, and Udorn and Ubon were all sapped at one time or another. So we had a very tight perimeter guard with trip flares, concertina wire, double fences, things like that. I, as an aircraft maintenance guy, being low ranking was also a security police augmentee. And we routinely did recalls, where in the middle of the night they would blow the siren, and if you were not on duty, and you were on the base, you would have to run over, dress, run over to the security police area, pick up your M-16, clip, have a flak jacket, helmet and they'd throw you in a jeep and take you out, pitch dark in the middle of the perimeter area somewhere and drop you off in a bunker with another guy. No lights, no nothing. Throw you in this bunker that may have pit vipers, or cobras. Oh Yeah, what an experience. And just sit out there, and you didn't know if it was the real thing or if it was an alert. And later on they would come by and they would know where you were supposed to be. They'd call your names and say, this is an alert. It wasn't uncommon to have animals set off trip flares. So you'd be working on the flight line, and off in the distance, on the other side of the runway you'd see a trip flare go up. And you'd see all the military police vehicles heading right over there to see if there had been a breach of the perimeter. Security was very tight.
MH: Mentioning that your additional duty as an augmentee for the security police, did you have any other additional duties that you were assigned?
DE: As a maintenance guy, no there is not really much you do. You work twelve hour shifts, you're either resting or you're working. Some guys rested very little, they would play and work. I did volunteer for, they came out looking for volunteers for the
FOD team, Foreign Object Damage Team. And we got to meet with the wing commander
and give him our advice on how we thought the FOD situation was, whether we thought
practices were too lax, whether we thought there was too much junk laying on the flight
lines and taxi ways. But that wasn't an additional duty that that helped pass the time. Got
you' a little recognition, you know things like that.

MH: You returned to the states about the 7th of December ‘73?
DE: I got back the 9th of December ‘73.

MH: Was it an immediate transition from Korat to San Francisco or did they hold
you over in the Philippines?
DE: No. Again this is an interesting little thing that happened. ‘73 was when, you
know, the big fuel crunch hit. And in anticipation of that, because they knew that there
might be problems, and you remember now the 27th of January ’73, just a month, less
than a month after I arrived there, there was a truce, the Paris Peace Accords were signed.
So we were not, I got there like at the very tail end of Linebacker II. And then they had
the peace treaty, and then we had a lull period and then they started bombing Laos and
Cambodia again. Even though Nixon said ‘We are not bombing Cambodia.’ We were
bombing Cambodia. And things were kind of winding down again now in December. So
they were trying to get as many people out as they could, before Christmas. And because
they were anticipating a big fuel shortage. So most people that had a port call of the 15th
of January or before, they were trying to get out before Christmas. And most of my
friends, even guys that were leaving after me, had already received their port calls. On the
7th of December I was working, and at lunch, I went to the orderly room and I said,
‘Have you got my port call yet?’ And they said, ‘Emery, where have you been? We have
been looking for you.’ I said, ‘I've been down on the flight line working, what's going
on?’ They said, ‘You leave tonight on a C-130 for Bangkok and Dave Grew is going with
you. Do you know where Dave Grew is?’ Well I did know where Dave Grew was, Dave
Grew and I had come over on the plane together, weren't real good friends but we knew
each other. And I knew that he'd been to a going away party for some other people the
night before, and he was out. I mean he was passed out in his barracks. And they said,
‘Well, you need to go get Dave Grew and drag him around to turn in your tools,’ to turn
in some special clothing, shoes and things they'd given us over there. And we had to turn
And you need to out-process today, because tonight at 7:00 you are on a 130 to Bangkok.’ And I said, ‘Bangkok, why am I going to Bangkok.’ They said, ‘Because there are no flights left on military charter flights, so we have to send you guys to Bangkok to get a passport. And we are giving you a ticket on a 747 to fly out of Bangkok International into San Francisco International.’ And after flying on the Flying Tiger that I told you we went over on- it was a cattle car, really stuffed full of people, and flying- the thought of getting to wear civilian clothes on a civilian airplane, with a movie and food, and stewardesses that weren't 45 years old to fly all the way back to the states was like ‘Yeah’. So Dave and I, I drug Dave around, he had to wear sun glasses he was in such bad shape. I drug him all around the base, and we got down to Bangkok that night. They put us up in a hotel. The next day we got our passports. They paid for everything but the passport. I had to pay twelve dollars to get the passport. They walked us through that, one day. And the next morning the 9th of December I was on a 747 heading for Hawaii. And I flew to Hawaii, and then I flew to San Francisco, and then I flew to Pennsylvania, where my wife had gone to stay with my family the last month I was overseas. And she met me there.

MH: The Air Force just let you go in Pennsylvania. They didn't out process you in California?

DE: Oh, well yeah. No, No, No. You had to in-process through customs in Hawaii. Which is a port of entry. And I went through there, but because I wasn't coming in on a military type thing I was just another civilian passenger. But I had a military ticket, you know. An MTA I think you call it, Military Transportation Authorization. To get the tickets I needed to get to Pittsburgh, and then my assignment was Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, so I had orders all the way to Shaw and I was allowed 30 days leave. There was no transitional thing. There were no briefings you are coming back to the world, this is how you have to act. There was nothing.

MH: When you came back, some Vietnam vets had trouble readjusting to the United States back over here, getting out of the military. You obviously stayed in. Did you have any trouble readjusting to not living in a war zone to not having trip flares go off every once in a while?
DE: Again, I was not in a war zone, I was in a country that was not at war. I was in a country that was an ally to the United States that allowed the United States to fly missions from their soil. So my experience as a Vietnam era vet is different from the experiences of even my counterpart Air Force Sergeant F-4 mechanic in Vietnam, at one of the bases in Vietnam where they not only had sapper attacks, but they had mortar attacks and they had these guys running through the bases from time to time blowing up airplanes and lobbing grenades into barracks. So I honestly did not have a traumatic experience in Thailand. My worst experience was dealing with the people that were doing drugs and so blind on alcohol that they just weren't rational. So a transition for me was not difficult whatsoever. Coming back, you know, eating a meal with my family wasn't you know a big deal for me. No nightmares, no being afraid to wear my uniform for fear someone was going to spit on me. So I really ... I can understand, but I honestly didn't suffer any of them.

MH: That basically concludes the outline I had. If there is anything else you can think of?

DE: I could give you hours of tape as we get going and you ask the questions. It was an interesting experience for me. I had volunteered, and you hadn't asked this about how I got to Thailand. I volunteered to go world wide anywhere because I'd been stationed, like I said, in Selma, Alabama, which was not a really fun place to be. Not a high glamour place, not a tourist resort area or anything like that. And I was just refueling T-37's and washing windshields, kicking the tires basically. So, and at the time, when I volunteered to go world wide remote extended I didn't care, I wasn't married, I hadn't met my wife yet. And I just wanted to get out of there, and go someplace and see the world the Air Force had promised me. Whether is was Europe, Japan, or Southeast Asia, I really did kind of want to go to Southeast Asia because guys coming back were telling these tremendous stories about things they'd seen and things they'd done. My dad had been in World War II in the South Pacific and had fought island to island you know his way to Japan. He was one of the first occupation troops there, and it was, I guess, kind of a deep seated thing like ‘Hey, there's a war going on here. And here I am in Selma, Alabama pumping gas in jets. I want to be a part of it. I don't want to spend 20 years and say 'Well
yeah, I never got to participate in the war.’ So I kind of hoped that they would send me to Vietnam. But they did send me to Thailand. (Recording stops)

MH: This is tape 2 of the interview with Captain David Howard Emery on the 8th of February.

DE: Um, an interesting story I was telling you there that I had volunteered world wide remote, kind of hoping to go to Southeast Asia, somewhere. Part of that was because of the WAPS test. The Weighted Airman Promotion System test. I had taken the test a couple of times for Staff Sergeant and had not passed because 90% of the test was on the F-4, the F-100, the F-105. These were all the warplanes that were fighting in Southeast Asia. There were 2 questions on the test on T-37's. And I just did not see myself getting promoted when I was competing against the guys that were working on these planes day in day out in Southeast Asia. So I volunteered. Showed up at Korat. I came into the orderly room, I was standing at this desk to in-process with all my papers. The guy didn't even look up, he said, ‘What do you want?’ I said, ‘I'm here to in-process.’ ‘What's your name?’ I said, ‘Sergeant Emery.’ ‘First name?’ ‘Dave.’ He said, ‘I ain't got time for this.’ ‘What are you talking about.’ He said, ‘I don't need to be fooled around with here.’ I said, ‘What are you talking about? I need to in-process.’ He said, ‘You in-processed last week.’ ‘No I didn't.’ He looked up at me, and said, ‘You're not the same guy.’ I said, ‘You mean there's another David Emery here?’ ‘Yeah, there's another David Emery here.’ I said, ‘Hey, wow, that's neat. Where does he work?’ ‘He's a Staff Sergeant.’ I said, ‘Oh great, I need to meet him.’ So after I in-processed, a couple of days later I made my way down to transient alert. I found Sergeant, Staff Sergeant David Emery. Different middle initial I said, ‘Hi, I'm Dave Emery.’ He said, ‘Oh, I'm Dave Emery too.’ We chatted for a minute, he said, ‘You're the guy that works in engine shop right?’ I said, ‘No, I'm a crew chief.’ And he said, ‘Well I heard there was a David Emery in the engine shop.’ So I checked into the engine shop. Guess what? There was another David Emery in the engine shop. We'd all processed in within a month of each other. I don't know. I really don't know for sure how this works. I volunteer world wide remote. I have a strange feeling at MPC, the personnel center, typed in ‘David Emery, remote, anywhere’ compute, and it spit out three sets of orders. I don't know but we were all at Korat within a month of each other. Two of us were aircraft guys
one was a shred out which is just a little different AFSC. And I followed them for a while through the Air Force. One retired as a Master Sergeant and one, the last time I heard from him, I talked to him when he was at Headquarters Langley, he was a senior chief master sergeant. That's when I was a first lieutenant. I don't know, is there anything else specifically you want to hear.

MH: I'm trying to think of anything I've missed back in the stories.

DE: Let me tell you a little story about, and this may be significant. Something that may be important years from now. I alluded to the fact they guys would run the girls real hard. And there was a little mutual running going on there. O.K.? Because the Thai women would take advantage of the Americans, especially the younger guys, to get a free ticket—whether it be money while they were there or to get married to get back to the states. It was a thing to get to the states, for a Thai woman. When I got on the plane in Bangkok, just before I got on the plane in Bangkok, to fly to the states, remember I told you I was going back commercial, on a 747. I was sitting in the airport. Dave Grew was off doing something else... so I was sitting by myself. In civilian clothes but I had a military haircut. This Thai girl came up to me and she had suitcases like she was getting ready to go on a trip. And she said in very poor English, ‘Are you American?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ She said, ‘Are you going this plane to San Francisco?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ She handed me a letter. Now this letter was written by, I think an Army guy. And it said, ‘Let me introduce my wife,’ and it gave her name, and child. ‘I had to come back to the states before I could make the arrangements for her to come with me. Everything has been made now, and she'll be traveling. If you would be so kind, if you are with her on a portion of the flight. If you could see that she gets through you know the entry way into the airplane, customs, these various things. Because she speaks almost no English. I would appreciate it very much.’ You know and he signed his name. So she wanted me to help her. And I looked around and I asked her in my very broken Thai, ‘Where's the baby?’ Because the letter said, I believe it was a son. She said that she didn't have a baby. And I said, ‘This said you have a baby.’ And she said, ‘No baby.’ and I said, ‘Is the baby dead?’ ‘No.’ I said, ‘You have never had a baby?’ ‘Never baby, never baby.’ And I said, ‘Your husband thinks you have a baby.’ ‘Uh...yeah, yeah. I want very much to go to America.’ So she had told this young guy, they had apparently gotten married just before
he left, that jived because he didn't have time to make all the arrangements for her.

Apparently told him that she was pregnant either before they got married or right after they got married or something~ I suspect just before they got married. And he left. Fully expecting that he has a son in Thailand. Saved up money, sent the money and all the arrangements did all the paperwork to get his wife and child back to the states. And I said, ‘This is a problem.’ She said, ‘Yeah, yeah, I know.’ Go I said, ‘No problem. I'll help you.’ It just happened we were the same flight all the way to San Francisco. And the letter, at the bottom it said, it gave the phone number of his parents. For somebody to call when they got to the states so the parents or he could come pick them up. So I got her on to the airplane. She sat next to me on the airplane. As a matter of fact, she had never flown before. Can you imagine that? She had never flown before. She asked if she could lay her head on my knee. For 12 hours her head did not leave my knee except when I said, ‘I have to go to the toilet.’ She didn't go to the toilet, she didn't sit up, she didn't eat. I would wake her up whenever the food came around she would say, ‘No, no, no.’ Woke her up when the movie came on. ‘No, no.’ She just laid her head on my knee and didn't move for 12 hours. I got off the plane in Hawaii. We were standing in line together. The customs people asked me if she was with me. I said, ‘Well, I'm just helping her along. I'm not married to her.’ And I showed them the letter. ‘Well, we have to take her for a search.’ She came back terrified. They had done a body search of her for drugs, and she was just petrified. Got back on the plane, and went to San Francisco. Got in there at night, called her in-laws and I said, I told them who I was and that your son's wife is here and I'm supposed to call to have someone come. ‘Well he's working. We'll come pick them up. Are she and the baby O.K.?’ And I said, ‘Well, you'll need to talk to her when you get here.’ And so I thought, ‘This is going to be interesting.’ I told them where she'd be. I told her to sit right outside a little hot dog shop in the airport. I said, ‘Don't move.’ I told them where she would be. And sure enough, I stood off some distance away. I told her goodbye and they came in. They recognized her, I guess from pictures, and she recognized them, apparently from pictures. And so they came over and they embraced her and they spoke as much as they could for a few minutes’ The mother, the father, and apparently the boy's sister. And they hugged her, they called her daughter, and never once said, ‘Where's the baby?’ It just shocked me. And they picked up her luggage and out to
the car they went. It was bizarre. And that's an indication. I told that whole story one,
because it was kind of strange what happened but two, that it was not uncommon for the
Thai girls because of the abject poverty that was over there, for them to either be with an
American on a relationship basis while the guy was there, as ti-loc, his girlfriend. Where
the guy would come live in their house, pay the bills, pay the food. And normally it was a
package deal. You could give the girl $100 a month and you could live in her house, she
would buy all the food, she would make the bed, she would shine your shoes, she would
do your clothes, and everything, and be your concubine for a year. For $100 a month.
And guys married, single, old, young were doing that. And then they'd have and the day
they would leave they would meet the next airplane, or next bunch of guys that would
come into the bar that night, they'd find a new ti-loc. And they'd go at it for a year. Or
some of them preferred to go to the states and marry the guys. Maybe after they had ti-
loc'ed for 3 or 4 years, had a succession of different boyfriends, then they'd marry one
guy and go back to the states. Preferably red-headed guys. They loved red heads. Yes,
you talk to a Thai woman and ask what American she liked the best. What kind of
American and they would say, ‘Ooh with the red hair, the red hair.’ And you ask them
why, and they'd say, ‘Because they make beautiful Thai babies.’ Yeah, it's funny.

MH: Were the troops allowed to stay off the base?
DE: Absolutely, absolutely. They could live off base, no problem.
MH: I wasn't sure if they were required ...
DE: Some guys were required to have a room on base. So they would have a dorm
room on base, a bed and a locker. And occasionally there would be like a dorm inspection
where they would have to make sure the room is up to date. They would live 99% of the
time downtown. If we had alerts or things like that they'd have to stay on base. Um... let
me see, some other things very quickly. You asked about the drugs and the alcohol,
whether things might have caused safety problems. The general attitude, did I mention to
you before about disregard for tech data and doing things the right way led to the death of
several people while I was there. A young fellow was working on one of our airplanes,
one of our F-4's in a hangar during one of the phased inspections. He'd been on leave for
a month in the states to see his new child. He'd just come back. His boss sent him out to
the airplane to remove, to prepare to remove the ejection seat. To do the full inspection.
He did not have the right tool with him, he did not have the proper tech data with him, he did not follow the right procedures. He was standing in the seat, leaning over the seat, using the wrong tool, wrong procedure, and tripped the seat mechanism. He had already disconnected the safety device that prevented the seat from being ejected before the canopy left the aircraft. So he had bypassed this safety feature. And when his hand slipped or this improper tool he was using slipped it caused the seat to fire through the canopy, which was open on the aircraft. And because he was standing on it, the top of the seat, which has a drogue parachute, caught him under the chin. Now he's riding the seat. His head broke the 5/8th inch stressed Plexiglas canopy. As the seat, well there is a catapult on the seat that extends about ten, eight or ten feet. It extends, when it's about at the top of it's extension then two rocket motors. Well there's a series of rocket motors, but it's like two big rockets on the bottom of the seat fire to thrust it away from the aircraft. So you have this long rod quickly telescoping and then these rockets light. And they light actually so fast, it's about, the seat was just passing through the broken canopy, they lit. It, they had 50,000 pounds of thrust that hit for like 0.5 seconds. And the seat, he finally was flipped out of the seat, the seat went through the corrugated steel roof and landed outside, to give you an idea of the force. He hit the I-beam along the very ridge of the roof and came straight back down, we're talking maybe 40 feet. And came straight back down spread eagle on the backbone of the aircraft with spike antennas sticking on top, impaling him on the chest, and he rolled over on to the wing, right next to a friend of mine that I'd gone to B-66 tech training with. And he was very dead. A very sad thing, but blatant disregard, guy had not worked on the system for a month, wrong tool, no tech data, no supervision, improper procedures, everything was wrong. And that was indicative of how many things happened over there. Just very unsafe.

MH: You had mentioned that alcohol and drugs may have affected it. Did they, do you know of any deaths that they caused?

DE: None that I heard directly of no. I'm sure they caused some lapses in judgment. Another guy was killed in our row of revetments one night, when I was on the day shift. Where he was a hydraulic troop inspecting for a hydraulic leak up in the speed brake well up in the wing of the F-4. And he had hydraulic and electric power on the aircraft and he extended the speed brakes, and failed to put an actuator lock on so that if
something happened the 45 speed brake wouldn't shut. The F-4 is designed with some safety of flight features that I call ‘slam shut’ features. What they are is, if you're, the planes in the air flying along and you lose electric power then some of the hydraulic actuators are spring loaded to move whatever it is they move to a neutral position so they won't affect the flight. If you are flying along with your speed brakes out, which break up the flow of air under the wing, and slow it down. If you have an electric failure you don't want the added problem of these speed brakes hanging out. So this little spring loaded switch would cause the actuators, under 3,000 pounds of pressure, to slam these speed brakes shut flush under the wings. He didn't put the safety lock on the actuator. He opened the speed brakes. He turned around, laid his shoulders on the speed brakes, with his head completely in the speed brake well with his flashlight looking for the leak. And he ran out of gas on the external power unit. And the speed brake did exactly what is was supposed to do, with 3,000 pounds of pressure, shut his head in the speed brake well. There's less than 2 inches clearance inside the well when it is shut. There's zero clearance along the trailing edge. It didn't totally decapitate him, but it instantly killed him. Those... those are things that just normally don't happen on a stateside base on a day to day basis. Those are just two, there are several more that I won't go into detail on that happened. And I attribute that to the war time mind set which was just not the same that it was stateside. Safety. Safety was disregarded, tech data was disregarded. Procedures were disregarded. It was kind of like ‘Hey, I know what I'm doing. I'll do it the fastest way I can get it done. I'm an ace mechanic.’ It killed people.

MH: I think that is about it unless...

DE: No, no, like I say, I could talk for hours but I think that gives you a pretty good representation of some of the things that happened the year that I was in Thailand.

MH: Thank you.