

Interview with
TED DONALD COX

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TED DONALD COX

Ted Donald Cox was interviewed on March 26, 2019 by Randall J. Bunn at the Southern Utah Veterans Home in Ivins, Washington County, Utah. He related his military experiences.

RB: Before we get into that, could we discuss your military service, could you tell me a little bit about your early childhood years. Where were you born?

TC: I was born in Santa Cruz, [Santa Cruz County] California. We moved around a little bit in Santa Cruz.

RB: When were you born?

TC: I was born May 20, 1951.

RB: Your parents were who?

TC: William Donald Cox and Dona May Jones.

RB: You mentioned to me before that you're kind of a multi-generation in California.

TC: We went back — I was born there, my mother was born there and my mother's mother and mother's mother's mother was born there — all the way back into the 1700s.

RB: Wow!

TC: When it was still Mexico [Territory].

RB: So is she of Hispanic origin?

TC: My mother, yes.

RB: Okay. Very good.

TC: This is something. Both of my parents had black hair.

RB: Alright. We're gonna to jump in and get that. This is your mother and her name is Donna May (Jones) [Cox].

TC: Yeah.

RB: Very good.

RB: What did your dad do for a living?

TC: He was a carpenter. Sometimes he worked for others and sometimes he did his own contracting.

RB: Okay.

TC: While I lived there I went to Soquel High School which is in Santa Cruz.

RB: Right.

TC: We graduated in 1969. I applied for a job in the [United States] Army.

RB: Before we get to the Army, tell me a little bit about growing up. You had how many siblings?

TC: I had a sister two years younger and a brother twelve years younger.

RB: So what was life like growing up in the 1950s in Santa Cruz area?

TC: I would think that's a golden time.

RB: Yeah. Was it?

TC: It was after the World War II.

RB: Yep.

TC: A lot of my uncles were veterans.

RB: Okay.

TC: Mostly [United States] Navy. I was also related to some other families. In the old days they had a lot of aunts and uncles that weren't really aunts and uncles. They were —

RB: They just called them that.

TC: — Close friends. It took me my lifetime to figure out.

RB: Who really was and wasn't. So you had a lot of family around in your area?

TC: We did. There were some really prime memories in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Like this one aunt and uncle, who really weren't, they were caretakers on this huge antique estate.

RB: Oh, yeah?

TC: It used to be a stage stop for the route to San Jose [Santa Clara County, California].

RB: Right.

TC: Their kitchen was where the saloon was.

RB: [Laughter] Oh, yeah.

TC: There were bullet holes in the ceiling.

RB: Oh, man!

TC: It was really old. There was a buggy in the barn.

RB: Really?

TC: Black leather buggy.

RB: Did you go and visit? Or would you ever stay there?

TC: We would go and they would just let me go play. We never really got watched while we were playing.

RB: Sure.

TC: We were sent to play and [we] were expected to come back at supper time.

RB: Right. That was the way it was back then.

TC: It was. [Laughter] *Spanky and Our Gang*.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: We went up —.

RB: When you say we, who was we?

TC: My sister and my cousins.

RB: Okay.

TC: The four of us would go up to, staying on these people's property, go up to their orchards up on the hill. It was just ripe fruit, just falling off the trees. We just gorged ourselves.

RB: [Laughter] Right!

TC: Everything, peaches, plums, it was just amazing!

RB: That sounds great!

TC: I wish I had some sort of film record of that, but just the memory of it is great.

RB: You have the memory of it.

TC: And a strawberry patch. We put in a big garden there since we didn't have room where we were living. We put the garden in and shared it with those folks.

RB: Okay, nice.

TC: A pretty good size garden.

RB: Did you play sports, or anything like that, growing up?

TC: No, I didn't. My dad didn't want me to hurt my knees.

RB: Okay.

TC: He was a martial artist. He was a champion in Northern California for two years, Jiu jitsu. He wouldn't let me play football, but I hurt myself all over doing martial arts.

RB: Okay. You went to some martial arts studios?

TC: Yes. He was the teacher.

RB: Oh, okay.

TC: He taught my sister how to beat me up. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

TC: I was always the one who got beat up.

RB: Yes.

TC: I learned, kind of vicariously, we had to do it even though she was the one doing it.

RB: [Laughter] That's funny.

TC: During that time period my dad, every evening, went and trained in that.

RB: Okay. Living close to the ocean, did you go down to the beach sometimes?

TC: You bet! I wasn't a surfer.

RB: No?

TC: I had a lot of friends that were. I was a worker. I went to work after school. I didn't go surfing.

RB: Of course. Did you work with your dad on projects?

TC: Yeah, mostly. He taught me everything, all the trades, so when I became a, what would you call it? I had my license to contract, I knew everything.

RB: What did you like the best out of all of this? Carpentry? Plumbing? Electrical?

TC: Out of all the trades? Well, I think it was the very first parts where he taught me how to use the tools, instruments, to determine where we were on the plotting on the property.

RB: That is interesting.

TC: Surveying skills.

RB: Sure.

TC: I did that. I liked that the best. One time I saw an engineer come and stay for about five minutes and then he left. Dad got a bill for \$300.00. I said, "Dad, I think I want to be an engineer."

RB: [Laughter] Yeah, right!

TC: [Laughter] Because I was the shovel worker at the time.

RB: He made that after five minutes?

TC: I dug the trenches and one time a basement.

RB: Really? [Laughter] Not with a backhoe or anything.

TC: No tools, we're talking shovel!

RB: Oh, man, that's crazy!

TC: But the land wasn't too bad there. There was one job that we got into where it was all rocks and we couldn't do it by hand. But mostly it was very soft and very easily dug.

RB: What was school like for you?

TC: School was school.

RB: Yeah. Wasn't your favorite thing?

TC: No. I didn't have any favorite things, unless it was after school. [Laughter] No, I really didn't. I had the opportunity to learn a lot of this. You kick yourself for not doing it all.

RB: You went to Soquel High School.

TC: Yeah.

RB: Graduated 1969. What was high school like in the 1960s?

TC: High school was interesting. You chose what to take, pretty much the whole thing.

RB: Okay.

TC: Since I was a pilot already, I got to — they put under my picture “most likely to become a airline pilot.”

RB: Oh, yeah. [Laughter]

TC: But we had three friends who were airline captains. They came and visited often. After I learned their experiences — all three of them had been divorced three times, at least.

RB: Oh.

TC: When I realized that there's not that much good to be marooned with six beautiful waitresses, stewardess that were your responsibility.

RB: That's true.

TC: Yea.

RB: And you're away from home all the time.

TC: The captain of the ship is in charge of the crew. So anyway, I figured it out.

RB: That wasn't for you.

TC: Then I wanted to be a bush pilot.

RB: Oh.

TC: But I didn't.

RB: You said you got your pilot's license. How did you get that?

TC: Well, that is just something that you can get when you're sixteen.

RB: But you said your dad, we were talking, already flew. He had a plane?

TC: Yeah. He taught himself to fly.

RB: So when you first get behind a cockpit in a plane?

TC: Right after I was born.

RB: Wow! [Laughter] So you kind of grew up in the air.

TC: Of course, I didn't pay any attention to how it was flown until I was about six.

RB: Six?

TC: I couldn't see out, but he taught me how to hold it on a certain course and keep the elevation even —

RB: Okay.

TC: — and not gain or lose any altitude.

RB: Correct.

TC: When I could do that, he taught me how to make turns —

RB: Okay.

TC: — and stay at the same altitude. Then how to make climbs and descents came next.

RB: Okay.

TC: Then it was my time to learn how to land.

RB: Oh, yeah. Was that scary?

TC: It was the hardest part. I think it is for any pilot.

RB: Sure.

TC: When I figured out that I could always just hit the throttle and go around if I wanted if it's not working out.

RB: Okay.

TC: That was a real important part to learn — and I think it should be trained. People who are new should be shown that from the very beginning.

RB: Sure.

TC: You worry about making a mistake.

RB: You got your pilot's license at sixteen then?

TC: I think it was sixteen. I didn't have a driver's license.

RB: You got your pilot's license before you got your driver's license?

TC: I got my driver's license when I was seventeen, almost eighteen.

RB: Did you have to go to any kind of formal training? Flight school or anything?

TC: No.

RB: You just had to prove that you knew how to operate the plane.

TC: I took the exams.

RB: Okay.

TC: And I challenged the flight course.

RB: Wow, that's great!

TC: Of course they challenged me to do this and do that. It was something that I enjoyed.

RB: Okay.

TC: I wanted to do it in the Army, but they said, "Listen, do this and then as soon as you can take some college courses."

RB: Right.

TC: "As soon as you have, maybe, three semesters you can apply." That's exactly what I did.

RB: Okay. So you graduated in 1969. Vietnam was in the thick of things going on, 1967, 1968 and 1969. If you didn't join the Army, you probably may have been drafted.

TC: I did have a draft card.

RB: Okay. So you graduated, probably what? June of 1969? Normal graduation time?

TC: Yeah. A lot of my buddies had older brothers that were killed. A lot of us younger ones decided to go in. I didn't realize it, but when I finished training at Fort Bragg [North Carolina] I was really ready to go to Vietnam. So that is how it worked out. I went to Vietnam then.

RB: When you graduated high school, you said you actually went to basic training in January of 1970. What did you do during that period before? When did you enlist?

TC: Oh, I was in college.

RB: Where did you go to college?

TC: Cabrillo College on the ocean [Aptos, Santa Cruz County, California].

RB: Okay, so you started taking some classes and then —.

TC: It was a community college.

RB: Yes. Right. Then you said you were in the delayed enlistment program?

TC: Yeah, that's because I went down there when it was almost Christmas.

RB: Okay.

TC: I said, "I want to join now. I don't want to go to school anymore." What I didn't realize was that there was a whole lot of schooling ahead of me.

RB: That's true! [Laughter]

TC: Every place I went! It was schooling.

RB: That is what the military is, always training.

TC: So I was just tired of high school. A lot of us were.

RB: So you reported. How did that work getting into the Army?

TC: I reported to the base January 5, [1970].

RB: What base was that?

TC: That was Fort Ord, California.

RB: Okay. So just down the road from you.

TC: Yeah. A few days before that, they sent me up to Oakland [Alameda County, California] to do my testing, get sworn in.

RB: Did they have a MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station] medical exam processing place? Was that up in Oakland too?

TC: Yeah.

RB: So you did all that. Were lots of other guys doing it at the time?

TC: Yeah.

RB: It was a pretty busy time.

TC: [It was a full job.

RB: So then you were to report to Fort Ord on the 5th of June.

TC: And have my hair cut off.

RB: That was where you did your basic training?

TC: That's right.

RB: How long was that? Do you recall?

TC: Yeah, it was thirteen weeks.

RB: Thirteen weeks? Tell me about basic training in 1970.

TC: My dad had been a squad leader when he was in basic. So I went up to the drill sergeant and asked if I could be a squad leader. He said, "You can be the platoon leader."

RB: Yeah?

TC: So I was the platoon guy, acting sergeant. Then I graduated with almost a perfect score. Ninety-nine point five.

RB: Amazing! Was that based upon a test or was that a whole bunch of things, points.

TC: Three days, the test lasted three days.

RB: Whoa! Really?

TC: Most of it was in little cubicles. You leave this cubicle and go to the next cubicle.

RB: Was it a written test?

TC: It was hand on.

RB: Oh, like what? What did they have you do?

TC: Everything from this guy's dying, this guy's choking.

RB: Oh. And you had to describe or actually solve the problem?

TC: How to take this rifle apart.

RB: Okay, got it.

TC: Go to the next one, down your alley, UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice].

RB: Oh, yeah.

TC: I don't even remember what it stands for.

RB: Uniform Code of Military Justice.

TC: Military justice. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

TC: So we had to learn all kinds of stuff like that.

RB: Sure.

TC: And we had to learn the general orders, the stuff that every soldier has to learn.

RB: Right, right.

TC: It's three days long, the test was.

RB: Yes. Was it is tough for you?

TC: No.

RB: You did pretty well.

TC: I was focused.

RB: Yes. Did you do a lot of studying, memorization, preparation?

TC: No.

RB: You just kind of absorbed it.

TC: It's kind of interesting. All the other guys went out partying —

RV: Oh.

TC: — as soon as we got so many weeks into the program and I didn't. I was just relaxed and focused. That's why I — there were four of us that got awards. One of them was [for getting] the best score on running and all that. Mine was on the whole thing, comprehensive.

RB: Did you want to be in the Army?

TC: Yeah.

RB: Where there guys there that didn't really want to be there?

TC: Sure. There were, in fact, half of my platoon were, what do you call it, the organization that is, they were from down in Puerto Rico [Army Reserve or National Guard].

RB: Okay.

TC: And they had to pass and then go back home.

RB: Oh, I see.

TC: The other guys they were also, see there was a designator, if you're RA, Regular Army —

RB: Or someone like National Guard?

TC: — NG, they're National Guard.

RB: Right.

TC: There were National Guard [Soldiers] from Puerto Rico, because it's our —.

RB: Territory, yeah.

TC: And another weird thing that happened was one of the trucks turned over hauling us. Three trucks that hauled us. And it was an open back like a cargo truck or trailer.

RB: Right.

TC: It tipped over and just wiped out all these guys. So I had a lot of guys in my platoon had casts on, crutches, bandaged heads and all kinds of stuff. We had to help them along.

RB: Oh, [laughter]! Right.

TC: They had to pass to go back to Puerto Rico.

RB: Sure.

TC: A lot of Puerto Ricans were in that truck. So anyway, to me it was an adventure.

RB: Sure, something different.

TC: I loved shooting and did very well in all that.

RB: Yeah.

TC: Like I say, I graduated top of the class. Then I went straight from there to the base that taught me how to be a flight engineer on a helicopter.

RB: That was where?

TC: That was in Fort Rucker [Daleville] Alabama.

RB: Okay.

TC: So I went there and it was all really interesting to me. And I graduated at the top of those classes.

RB: So because you had graduated top of your class at basic training, did they give you some choice or some preference of what you wanted to do?

TC: I had already made that choice.

RB: That was what you wanted.

TC: That was my goal to learn everything I could about the helicopter. It really helped me to be a better pilot.

RB: Sure.

TC: It really did.

RB: That's cool.

TC: But also I did a year and a few months in Vietnam as a flight engineer.

RB: So basic training was about thirteen weeks. That took you into spring of 1970 and then you went to the flight engineer course at Fort Rucker.

TC: Yeah.

RB: How long was that course?

TC: Fort Rucker [was] about twelve weeks.

RB: So another three months of training.

TC: This is a hat that we had. [Showed interviewer a military ball cap.]

RB: Nice. I like that.

TC: Let's see, where are we?

RB: So you are at flight engineer course on the Huey [Bell UH-1 Iroquois helicopter] at Fort Rucker. You graduated pretty well out of that course?

TC: Top of my class. Then I went to —

RB: Did you go to jump school?

TC: — Fort Benning [Columbus] Georgia. That is what I couldn't remember before.

RB: Right, right.

TC: It wasn't that long. It was very, very intensive. And then I graduated. There was no first or last in that course.

RB: Okay.

TC: If you live through jumping out then you graduated. That's what we did.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: Then I went directly to Fort Benning and was a member of the 82nd Airborne Division.

RB: Fort Benning, Georgia. That was in, looks like —

TC: That was my jump school.

RB: — you finished up in July of 1970. So you went training, training, training. One right after another in 1970.

TC: Yeah.

RB: Tell me about what jump school was like. Essentially, you're learning how to parachute. Right?

TC: Yeah. Jump School was really amazing. We ran everywhere. We were up way before daylight.

RB: You must have been in pretty good physical shape.

TC: I got in really good shape.

RB: Right.

TC: Everything we did — we dropped for pushups.

RB: Yeah.

TC: We had to do pull-ups. We had to do overhead ladder racing down and back.

RB: How many pull-ups could you do, at your peak? Do you remember?

TC: No, I didn't excel in that. My dad would always interrupt me, "I was number one!"

RB: Okay.

TC: My dad was very strong.

RB: How about pushups? How many could you do?

TC: Yeah, I could do the fifty pushups.

RB: Yeah.

TC: I think I did like seventeen pull-ups. I did whatever was required.

RB: Required, but you were not like some superstar.

TC: Very, very difficult.

RB: For whatever reason that's a tough one [pull-ups] for people.

TC: If they have strong arms and a light body it works pretty good.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: I always had big legs. Strong legs and so I think I had a little extra weight there.

RB: Then your running ability? Were you pretty —

TC: Oh, boy! We ran, we ran, we ran! Just everywhere. We went to go eat and we came back from eating, we went out to this field to practice, or whatever. I don't think we ever rode in anything.

RB: Yeah. Did you like the comraderie of those experiences? How was that for you?

TC: Yeah. It wasn't much. Everything was pretty, I would call it, so focused that we didn't really joke. At least I didn't. I was all serious about the whole thing.

RB: Sure, sure.

TC: I didn't mess around with the other guys.

RB: Okay.

TC: But you know like I said, that is what makes me excel.

RB: Yeah.

TC: But jump school was amazing. One of the most amazing things was that they hooked us up. They had a 250-foot tower, tick, tick, tick. They had a parachute that would clipped already round and you were hanging there. And then they took you up there and let you go. Yaaaaay...[sound as if falling from the tower on the wire]. And you landed in the spot field.

RB: So that was kind of giving the feel of what it is like just before you land? And the parachute comes down.

TC: Yeah. It wasn't anything like the real thing. The real thing was nothing but huge noise because you are behind the engines of these planes and the doors are open. You jump out from that huge noise to instant silence.

RB: Oh! I was interviewing a guy, he lives here, McCleeve, have you ever met him?

TC: No.

RB: Robert McCleeve. Anyway, he was [in] World War II and he went to Italy after VE-Day, I think it was in the fall of 1945. His job was actually to, he was an assassin, he was going after Mussolini's men that were still uncaptured.

TC: The OSS or whatever?

RB: Yes. But they had to parachute in. He said, "Man, you jump out of this plane, you're going down pretty fast and you pull your cord. The momentum pulls you up and so in your groin area, that was really hard."

TC: Yeah.

RB: I was trying to imagine that feel. You jump out of this plane, which is one feel. It's noise, silence, and you're free falling. When do you know when to pull the cord?

TC: Okay. You count.

RB: Okay.

TC: To four. One thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand. Then you look up and make sure your chute's good. If it isn't, you have time, hopefully, because we jumped kind of low.

RB: Alright.

TC: You cut that chute away, pull your reserve and help it get out. I didn't experience that nor did I see anyone do it.

RB: So you are free falling, then what happens when you pull it?

TC: No, you don't pull anything.

RB: Oh.

TC: In general training, you jump out and you are attached with, I think it is about a twenty foot cord.

RB: Okay.

TC: A really strong line, a heavy line.

RB: And that opens the parachute?

TC: That pulls your parachute open.

RB: Ah.

TC: It yanks the whole top of it out. You have this long stream and you're counting to a four. It opens up and you look up at the end of four and you see, "Ah, good." Now when you watch them, it is very educational when you watch these. You can go on You Tube and see the 82nd Airborne Division out of C-17's. There are just hundreds of guys, just go out. A lot of times we went out, we were 250 pounds with our body weight plus the big bags. Anyway, the training was unbelievable and then we graduated from there. Funny, I don't remember too much of that.

RB: Okay.

TC: Then got transport up to Fort Benning, Georgia.

RB: Right.

TC: Other people went other places. X number of people went. Some of them went to the 101st Airborne Division and we went to the 82nd.

RB: Okay.

TC: I was there and we had training going all the time. I was a Specialist 4 at the time I got there.

RB: Specialist 4 is what?

TC: Corporal.

RB: An E-3?

TC: E-4.

RB: E-4, okay, I'm sorry. Alright.

TC: Yeah and then got orders for Vietnam.

RB: When did you go out? Before you went to Vietnam, did you get leave to come home?

TC: Yeah, but I used it up traveling across the country.

RB: Okay. So you got to the west coast then, what, did you fly out of Oakland [California] or —?

TC: We flew out of Travis [Air Force Base, California].

RB: Travis, of course.

TC: Sent to Oakland for, I don't know if we got, yeah, we got our jungle fatigues and stuff.

RB: So you got all your gear and got ready to go.

TC: Yeah.

RB: Tell me about going overseas. Was that the first time you were ever overseas? Out of the country?

TC: Yes, that was the first time.

RB: So what was that experience like?

TC: We were all like a deer looking in the headlights.

RB: Well, sure. So it's like okay, no kidding, we are going over to Vietnam. You've heard stories of people dying.

TC: Yes, it was Tiger Airlines.

RB: Yes, Tiger Airlines.

TC: We went through, up to Alaska.

RB: Elmendorf [Air Force Base, Anchorage, Alaska]? Or —?

TC: I think the one down by Anchorage. I don't know the name of it. Anyway, we landed there for fuel.

RB: Landed there, right.

TC: We didn't get out of the aircraft. Then we flew on to Japan and we did get out there.

RB: At Yokota [Air Base, Japan] or Okinawa?

TC: I think it was Yokota. That's when I saw the first lady in the men's bathroom.

RB: The what?

TC: That was the first time I had ever seen a woman in a man's bathroom.

RB: Oh? In a men's bathroom? She's cleaning it. [Laughter]

TC: Cleaning it, intro, Asian.

RB: Right, right. Like, oh!

TC: Trying Asian things. It was like, Holy Mackerel!

RB: Yeah, "What are you doing here?"

TC: When we finally got to Bien Hoa [Air Base, Vietnam].

RB: That was where you landed?

TC: Yeah, anyway we got on a bus.

RB: Okay.

TC: When I hear these guys telling about their Vietnam experience, they all say the same exact thing. "We got on bus and there were wire screens on the windows. We were looking out and we saw these people and the smell was so bad."

RB: Yeah. Describe the smell to me. What was that like? Do you remember?

TC: Well, I had never been any place that smelled.

RB: Right. And you were in the summertime, too. Because you got there in July, the middle of 1970. Hot!

TC: Very hot.

RB: Humid and it has this smell.

TC: Humidity. See, I just didn't experience that in life before that.

RB: Right.

TC: That was it. People were so different. I looked at this one lady, I thought she had been hit in the mouth because she had red ooze coming out of her mouth.

RB: Oh, my gosh!

TC: She had black teeth. And it was beetle nut.

RB: Oh.

TC: Some of the older ones think it is a sign of beauty to chew that stuff.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: It has red juice and they spit it out.

RB: Like tobacco [chewers]? [Laughter]

TC: Yeah, like chewing tobacco.

RB: Oh my gosh! No, it's not beautiful!

TC: "That lady's been hit in the mouth."

RB: Yeah, that's crazy!

TC: So, I didn't get any advanced medical training before this. They sent me to a dust off.

RB: What's that?

TC: Dust off is kind of a nickname for the Medevac [medical evacuation by helicopters].

RB: Okay.

TC: Anywhere there is a battle going on we went and got the people out.

RB: Oh, okay.

TC: It was a real experience. Anyway, when we landed in the battlefield, of course, it's very confusing. Noise is amazing! There's big bombs going off and there's machine guns and bullets zipping all over. You get the wounded guys. Sometimes you get help, sometimes you don't. It was my job to, I was the only one who got off the helicopter. I got all the wounded on. Then we took off. At that moment I became an assistant medic.

RB: Okay. What was your specific title, job, when you first got to Vietnam? You were working with, you were on a helicopter crew, right?

TC: Yeah, crew engineer, CE.

RB: Crew engineer and the function of a crew engineer is what?

TC: A crew engineer is, knows everything that needs to be right on the helicopter.

RB: Okay.

TC: And has checked it.

RB: That is what you had studied at flight engineer school?

TC: Oh, yeah.

RB: Okay.

TC: Usually, I would have had a machine gun on one side, but our medical rescue helicopters, we did not have machine guns.

RB: Right.

TC: We had our M-16's, our .38's and M-79's with a lot of shells for the .40 millimeter cannon.

RB: Okay.

TC: That's all we had. Anyway, the first time I carried my rifle out, I was sorry I did it cause it just got in the way. You're carrying this guy and he's got a rifle.

RB: [Laughter], yeah.

TC: I mean it's terrible. So after that I left my, I had my .38.

RB: Right, so you had some weapon, but rifle. You had to actually, physically, pick up this wounded soldier?

TC: Sometimes I carried them fireman [gesturing as if carrying a man over his shoulder].

RB: Man!

TC: Sometimes I carried them like this. Now, there were a lot of Vietnamese soldiers that got wounded. They were much easier to pick [up].

RB: Yes, they were not as heavy.

TC: But once in awhile I would get a giant, an American.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: It was just — . I thought I was going to break my back.

RB: Oh, man! So, what did you fly?

TC: We were in this helicopter right here. [Gesturing to the name on his cap.]

RB: What was it?

TC: A Hughes.

RB: A Hughes?

TC: No, excuse me, a Bell 369 [helicopter].

RB: Okay.

TC: It's the Huey.

RB: That is what they call it?

TC: The Huey.

RB: Who makes it?

TC: Bell.

RB: Bell, okay.

TC: Bell Helicopter makes it and the other part of it is a lot of the big helicopters in the [United States] Air Force were also that type of helicopter and had a job to go in and get wounded out.

RB: How many men —.

TC: The Jolly Green Giants.

RB: I have heard that Jolly Green Giants — how many men were on the crew of a Huey?

TC: There's a flight engineer, the medic, the co-pilot and the pilot.

RB: So there were four. And how many wounded could you get in before it's too many?

TC: I had so many I couldn't count.

RB: Wow!

TC: I just jammed 'em everywhere.

RB: Yeah.

TC: They were all pretty much in shock and everybody was confused. The sound's amazing. We've got our own helicopter sound, we've got all kinds of stuff in the air blowing around, ashes and stuff.

RB: Sure.

TC: We've got machine guns going in the battle that we're —.

RB: Offensive and defensive stuff?

TC: Oh, yeah. And then sometimes one of us gets killed.

RB: Yeah.

TC: And, but anyway, I gathered up all the wounded and/or made sure everything was right, then I jumped in and we took off.

RB: When you are doing that, you're out there gathering the wounded and there's gun fire, perhaps, going on, what were you thinking? What were you feeling at that moment?

TC: I was, I was very much focused on getting every wounded person on the aircraft.

RB: Okay. So you weren't feeling fear?

TC: I didn't count, I just picked them up.

RB: You were just doing your job. In spite of everything you could block it out okay, enough to just focus on getting these guys?

TC: During that I didn't have any fear at all.

RB: Interesting.

TC: Fear came after we were heading back. That's when I'd look around and say, "Whoa! We made it!" The day is over. We got back.

RB: So were you just kind of operating on adrenaline, you think, in the moment?

TC: I guess.

RB: Yeah. Just doing it and you are not even thinking. It's just focusing on the task at hand.

TC: Bullets were going really close, up through the helicopter, you know like right here and stuff. [Gesturing to the side of his right thigh.]

RB: Did you ever get shot?

TC: No.

RB: Okay.

TC: I had friends that did.

RB: So no purple heart for you.

TC: No purple heart.

RB: [Laughter] Which is nice.

TC: I didn't care because it's too iffy.

RB: Of course.

TC: You might lose your bones – your leg bone.

RB: You could be paralyzed, all kinds of stuff.

TC: There was no —.

RB: No glory in getting hit. [Laughter]

TC: Yeah. I mean, we all kind of were jealous when a guy would get a clean wound, you know, and get a purple heart.

RB: Yeah, right.

TC: There was just so much carnage.

RB: Yeah.

TC: And you're in shock because of the carnage.

RB: Sure. So you witnessed guys, perhaps on your helicopter, who didn't make it?

TC: Oh, sure.

RB: Yeah. What was that like?

TC: It was all in a day's work.

RB: Yeah.

TC: Someone else took them away.

RB: Sure. Were you able to get to the point where you disassociated yourself from, I guess, death in a certain way? That was —.

TC: No, I was young. I was nineteen.

RB: Okay.

TC: I was twenty. Let's see, I was twenty. Because I turned twenty-one —.

RB: Right.

TC: And I had just been through all kinds of training.

RB: Yeah.

TC: And I just considered this a real final exam —

RB: Right.

TC: — to keep my cool.

RB: That's good. And every guy and that you could get back to the hospital, essentially, was like a victory for you? Perhaps? They didn't die in your care, so to speak.

TC: Yeah, we were still under obligations to care for them until they finally were taken away.

RB: And you learned, I don't know, I call it first aid treatment? You went through all that?

TC: I bandaged and treated some of the most gory things you can imagine.

RB: Wow!

TC: Shot through the mouth,[gesturing to his mouth, cheek through mouth] everything.

RB: Yeah.

TC: Clearing the airways is one of the key ones.

RB: Sure.

TC: You can stop the bleeding.

RB: Right.

TC: You look and see if the airway's obstructed. When they got teeth, and everything, there is not too much you can do. I never did perform a trach [tracheostomy].

RB: Okay.

TC: Which could have been done on that guy, but I thought he was breathing okay despite the situation.

RB: Okay. Did he make it?

TC: I don't know.

RB: Obviously, yes. What, you fly back to the base you were flying out of? The nurses, the medical folks, would come running out and —

TC: No, not like on *MASH*! [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] I was going to say, not like *MASH*?

TC: There were a group of enlisted men came out with gurneys and would load people up. We would just sit there with the helicopter running while they were all taken. We would fly over and get refueled and maybe, go back out, depends on if the battle's still going or they needed us someplace else.

RB: I see.

TC: I flew ten hours one day and it was one battle after another different places.

RB: Wow! So did you stay the same place as your home base for the entire year?

TC: Yeah, I did.

RB: Flying helicopters out of there? Was it only in Vietnam? Did you ever get into Laos, Cambodia or anything?

TC: I think we were in Cambodia a few times. But there's no dotted line.

RB: Yeah, it is just all jungle.

TC: We flew rescues right along the edge. I think maybe if we had used the instruments on the helicopter we might have been able to determine where we were exactly. But it didn't work out.

RB: You mentioned in spring of 1971 there was an offensive there. 1972?

TC: The Easter Offensive of 1972 —

RB: Yeah, that's right.

TC: — was equal to the TET of '68.

RB: What was that about? Do you remember?

TC: First of all, realize that almost all of American troops are gone.

RB: Yeah, by 1972, because they were drawn down under [President Richard] Nixon?

TC: Yeah, and the South Vietnamese Army, mostly the super goods ones, the commandoes and the airborne infantry types, they were working with us. They had to take the battles. The American guys were gone. They were a formidable number of people. I think I've heard it second only to China as far as having the x number of soldiers.

RB: Wow! Okay.

TC: We were okay there. I treated 'em like they were one of us. Of course, I always had good feelings toward the Vietnamese. We rescued just all kinds of people.

RB: Yeah.

TC: But some of the time we would get in trouble. One time I got so many people on board that the controls all the way back on the slide switch were still going fast forward. You couldn't slow yourself down

RB: Oh, my gosh!

TC: The pilot and I were talking and he said, "I don't have any stick left." The next thing out of my mouth was going to be, "Do I have to throw some people out?" That was going to be the next thing to do but he said, "No, we're going to try something else." So we went all the way to our destination and we skidded on the runway.

RB: Really?

TC: Expert flying! I didn't learn that until later in flight school how to do that. If your center of gravity is way too far forward and you can't hold back the speed, we just slid on and that slowed us down. Gosh, we had a lot, I think we must have had twenty guys.

RB: Man!

TC: But they were Vietnamese, which are small people, and they didn't mind getting stacked up.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: Because it was either that or stay back in the battle.

RB: Sure, sure.

TC: They were willing to do just about anything.

RB: You were at Bien Hoa [Air Base]? Is that what you said?

TC: No, that is where I landed.

RB: Where you stationed at? Your home place?

TC: My main base was, I will think of it. Anyway a lot of the times we would leave there and we would stay two weeks down in where the battles were.

RB: Okay.

TC: When we went down to —.

RB: It says in your award of the Distinguished Flying Cross, this is December of 1971, “while flying as a crew engineer aboard an unarmed medical evacuation helicopter on a mission to evacuate wounded from a location near Trang Bang [a town in Tay Ninh Province, Vietnam].

TC: Yeah. It’s a town, a village. Did you ever see the photograph of the little girl running with her clothes on —. [Phan Thi Kim Phuc, the girl referred to informally as the “Napalm Girl” in the Pulitzer Prize winning photograph taken at Trang Bang on June 8, 1972.]

RB: Yes.

TC: I was there that day and that’s what part of that was about.

RB: Really? That is a photograph that actually —.

TC: You never forget when you see it.

RB: No, no, amazing. It’s ingrained in your memory.

TC: I was there. What happened was a Vietnamese pilot on a single prop bomber, a Douglas [A-1 Skyraider], he dropped the napalm too close to the village. It hit some of the huts. And that girl had her clothing burned off and they all were running from that village.

RB: Sure.

TC: I didn’t know that I had been part of that until I saw an actual footnote underneath that picture of that little girl that said, “That same day Trang Bang.” I got to thinking, oh yeah, I had to be.

RB: I was there that day. It was right after Christmas, I think. 27th of —

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

RB: December.

TC: I had my hands full of all kinds of wounded guys that day. I didn’t know that some of the civilians had been hit.

RB: Oh, sure.

TC: But I got the whole platoon out in one load.

RB: Wow! Okay. If there had been a civilian that had been wounded would they ever get taken back?

TC: Oh, sure.

RB: Okay.

TC: It was whoever needed the —.

RB: Right. Apart from these constant missions that you went on, was there down time that you had?

TC: Yeah.

RB: What was that like?

TC: You'd be given three or four days to go down to some of the more civilized places.

RB: Did you ever get into Saigon?

TC: Yeah, Saigon. I got into Vung Tau [largest city and former capital of Ba Ria-Vung-Tau Province, Vietnam]. That was the regular place I went to.

RB: Okay.

TC: I enjoyed the oriental food.

RB: Oh, you did? What did you think of the Vietnamese people in general?

TC: Well, you gotta realize you suspect everybody.

RB: Of course, yeah.

TC: And literally.

RB: But did you make friends with some of the other military troops?

TC: I couldn't speak Vietnamese.

RB: Of course.

TC: I would say that I was considered a friend by them, because I was good to them.

RB: Have you had a chance to meet a guy by the name of [Greg Watson] Beesley here?

TC: I have known a Beesley, in the past.

RB: Yeah, you are in 600, he's in, I think he's in 700 [the block of rooms at the Southern Utah Veterans Home]. Part of his job in the Army was, I forget what they're called now, but the group that would go into the villages and make friends with the villagers. And try to win their confidence.

TC: Special Forces.

RB: Yeah. I met with him a few weeks ago and he was talking about, he actually got to know —

TC: He probably had language skills. I wanted to go through Green Beret training. I was there. I had my jump wings. I was there at Fort Bragg, but I took the foreign language aptitude test and flunked it.

RB: Oh, shoot! [Laughter]

TC: So I took it again, and flunked it again. Eight times!

RB: That was not your forte.

TC: Actually, later on I took it back here in the states as a civilian, first. I flunked it too.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: I had no aptitude for —.

RB: Languages or whatever they were trying to test you on.

TC: I vowed to learn English.

RB: Yeah. So you are there for, it sounded like, about fourteen months?

TC: Fourteen months, ten days.

RB: And ten days. You finally got orders to leave. What was that like?

TC: I never got a time to leave. What do they call it? [DEROS; Date Estimated Return From Overseas.] I never got to do that. When my time came to do that we were in the middle of the Easter Offensive of 1973.

RB: Oh.

TC: I would have put our mission in a bind if I had left them. Because there were only several of us that were crew engineers.

RB: So you stayed longer than most?

TC: I stayed longer. I skipped my, what do they call it?

RB: R & R [Rest and Recuperation]?

TC: Yeah. I did not have an R & R. I did so because of the need for the mission of our company.

RB: Okay.

TC: And it didn't bother me, because there were times —. One time I went down and, I can't remember, oh, shopping was what we did most of. Shopping and eating Chinese food.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: That was great! Fairly nice lunch hour. I was due to come back on the next day, so early I went up, I was supposed to catch a CH-47, which was dual rotors. You loaded it in the back. I was on that manifest, was supposed to go there to this little

airfield and catch that ride back to my base. I got to where I was almost at the base. I heard it start up and I just stopped in my tracks and I said, "I want to go back to the village again."

RB: Oh.

TC: So I turned around and I went back to the village. That aircraft blew up in the sky.

RB: Oh my gosh!

TC: Fourteen people were killed.

RB: You were supposed to be on that?

TC: The next day I called my outfit and said, "I'm late I know getting back, but [laughter] can I have a couple more days?" They were like, "Are you sure this is you?" "Yeah." "We are doing the paperwork on you 'cause you are dead."

RB: Oh my gosh! You were supposed to be on that —.

TC: I was on that manifest.

RB: Oh my gosh! Wow!

TC: And everybody was killed.

RB: When was that? That was in the Easter Offensive?

TC: Let's see. I think it was before it started.

RB: Okay. Wow!

TC: You see, I got that one award and it was in December, almost Christmas.

RB: Right.

TC: I took advantage of going on days off, going twice a month I'd go down. I would take a little time off and do some shopping. I wasn't rich. I was only getting \$500.00 a month.

RB: Yeah. What kind of stuff did you buy?

TC: I bought a lot of enameled pottery stuff. They do a real good job of that.

RB: Nice.

TC: And some of, what else did it get? I liked the carving stuff. A lot of that was over in Thailand. They made it there and brought it over and had it for sale. I also went to the PX [Post Exchange]. It was a big thing to go to the PX in Ho Chi Minh City and so I would go there. A couple of the big bases, Long Binh, that fills the blank earlier. You asked me where the original helicopter pad was.

RB: Okay. Oh, yeah.

TC: I had a room, like this, in a Quonset hut, we each had, but then like I say, we would go and stay in another place for a couple of weeks to be closer to the battle

site. I would come back and the Vietnamese gals had taken over my room and were cooking with Nuoc Mam which is this rotten fish sauce.

RB: Oh, man! Really?

TC: You can still buy it at the stores, fish sauce. But it's literally, they put the heads of the fish in there and bury it in the ground for a long time.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: It is really rancid.

RB: Oh, gosh!

TC: And they use that juice for flavoring. The flavoring was always good, but I didn't — it smelled so bad. It was like walking into a house full of chickens. I was like, "What are you guys doing here?" They didn't know when I was coming back.

RB: Right.

TC: Everything was going up in the air, like all the chickens flying.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: It was like, "AHHHH! Jam, jam, jam!" I couldn't understand a word. They were getting their clothes. They had some of the other guys clothes that were ironed. They kind of made a workshop out of my [room].

RB: Your place?

TC: Yeah.

RB: You weren't using it.

TC: But I was often gone, so I let them do things as long as I didn't have to smell that stuff.

RB: Right, right.

TC: I would tell them, "Okay, I am home." Then I would go back. We had a place where we could get sodas and hamburgers and stuff. We ate C-rations almost all the time.

RB: Did you, really? Okay.

TC: When we left I got, there were four of us, so I got a box which is twelve. You pick out of that what you want to eat. So, that's what we did. I got a bullet in one of my fruit cocktail once.

RB: [Laughter]

TC: And it stopped right there.

RB: Oh, my gosh!

TC: When we got back I had to see what the bullet did. It came in through the bottom and went through an I-beam. The I-beams were made out of some sort of aluminum alloy, super-duper tough stuff. But the bullet went through that and then up through the floor into my can and stopped in the can. I couldn't figure out, syrup all over? I couldn't figure out what was going on. Finally, I got the can and saw the hole in the bottom, cut the top out, dumped out the fruit cocktail and there's the bullet.

BF: [Laughter]

RB: That's crazy!

TC: I actually, gave it to my medic, figuring I would get a bunch more, but I never was able to gather. They would come through the helicopter and I would look through to see what they did, but I —.

RB: That was the only one?

TC: Yeah. Friends of mine got shot through the transmission. They had to force land and get picked up by somebody else.

RB: Oh, gosh. When you weren't flying and you're sleeping in your Quonset hut, what was that like? Was it tough to sleep? Or?

TC: Oh, no, I never had a hard time sleeping. We had mosquito nets and a regular bunk bed that kinda swayed a little. [Knock on door] Every day they ask me what I want to eat the next day. [Referring to staff at Southern Utah Veterans Home who knocked at door.]

RB: Oh, that's nice.

TC: But there was one thing that will always be with me and that's a really neat friend, one of the greatest pilots. He was the one that did the running landing. He was my hero and he was the only one married with a baby. On his last mission to fly, he was killed.

RB: Oh, man!

TC: I am saying the last hour of flying!

RB: He went through a whole year plus? That's tragic.

TC: He went through the whole year and they got a call that there were three advisors wounded at such and such an intersection of a dirt road. He answered the call. He went down there. It was night time. Should have been back to the base. He took this mission and it was a trap.

RB: Oh?

TC: He was coming down to land and they shot him right through the plexi-glass and it hit half-inch above his armor.

RB: Oh, man! What was his name? Do you recall?

TC: Robert Horst, H-O-R-S-T CW2 [Chief Warrant Officer]. I'll never forget that.

RB: Sure.

TC: So then, anyway, I got back from Vietnam in September and I went back to flying with my dad a lot. Yeah, I had some issues with — [hesitation].

RB: PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome] or what?

TC: Yeah, I would call it that. I didn't know what to make of it. I didn't know there was anyone to go talk to.

RB: Right.

TC: So I just bit the bullet.

RB: How does it manifest itself in your life?

TC: At the end of my first marriage, I started feeling weird. I threw all my picture albums away that I had of the war and everything. That was another thing I did was photography.

RB: Oh, okay.

TC: I threw them all away. I went through some weird feelings. All my friends were in different places. They went different directions. I wasn't in touch with anybody. I finally went through a small counseling agreement. I can't remember what they called themselves. But anyway, I did that down in Santa Cruz [California]. I think that was the first time I got, I got a pamphlet that described me "to a T". Then I knew that I was gonna have to deal with this.

RB: Did you have trouble sleeping when you got back to the states? Did memories come back to you? Or what?

TC: I started to [have problems sleeping]. I started to have a real heavy paranoia at times.

RB: It sounds —.

TC: I was always afraid of being left behind. So I was out of the helicopter. I was often really worried that it was gonna take off.

RB: And you would be left on the ground and no way to get out?

TC: So I started carrying more and more stuff. At one time I had all my pockets, this is a flight suit, actually two piece, I had my pockets full of maps, ammo for my pistol —.

RB: Like survival kind of preparation?

TC: Yeah. Everything! Fishing equipment, everything you can imagine. I started thinking yeah, it's gonna happen any day?

RB: What am I going to do?

TC: Look what happened to “Bob.”

RB: Yeah.

TC: So it could happen the last day. I just, uh...[emotional]. When I did get home it didn’t stop. Worrying about it didn’t stop.

RB: The same mentality of something is going to drop, something is going to happen. I got to be prepared for it.

TC: Yeah.

RB: Kind of worried about what’s going to happen?

TC: It isn’t over yet, that type of feeling. On the TV it was weird.

RB: How so?

TC: Well, you gotta think of it. The media treated, the Offensive of 72 [1972], like it wasn’t even Americas, part of an American experience.

RB: Yeah.

TC: When I saw that, I was irate!

RB: Yeah.

TC: I kept picking up books on the history of Vietnam. I wasn’t there. They didn’t even mention it, everything was focused on 1968, what happened to the Americans.

RB: Oh. Right.

TC: 14,000 killed.

RB: Right, that was awful.

TC: Man, I started getting upset with that.

RB: Sure.

TC: Just now, they are finally starting to tell it all.

RB: Tell the story? Yeah, wow!

TC: Yeah. And it’s really, I started finding more and more videos of what happened in the Siege of An Loc [a major battle that lasted sixty six days in 1972 culminating in a tactical victory of South Vietnam]. See, we were only sixty miles from Saigon and the enemy was there with 100 tanks, Russian T-55 tanks. Now, they were spread out a little bit, but they came down and they were gonna just drive right down the highway. Highway 13 went right to Saigon.

RB: Right.

TC: And it was only, like I say, sixty miles. I think the way we got that licked was the B-52s. The commander there, the American Commander, he asked, I think Nixon, for a B-52 twenty-five hour drops of B-52 rounds. I mean continuous!

RB: Yeah.

TC: Unbelievable!

RB: Against that contingent of tanks?

TC: Oh, yeah! You could feel the earth bouncing.

RB: Oh, man!

TC: It pulverized huge numbers of enemy. And got it to where it was manageable, by the commandos and paratroopers and Special Forces. Everybody that was still there and a lot of aviation guys were still there. The Air Force was still there. Not only did they do the B-52s, but they did a huge amounts of some small jet fighters, dropped stuff.

RB: Yes.

TC: I tell you what, we really showed what needed to be done. And we won!

RB: That Offensive?

TC: Yeah. We won! I won't show it to you right now, I'll show it to you later, we won the war in Vietnam.

RB: Yep!

TC: Very people know that.

RB: Yep. What do you mean?

TC: Back at Washington, it was declared V-V Day, victory. I want to show it to you, can you follow me?

RB: Yep.

[RECORDING STOPPED. END OF RECORDING TWO.]

Started again on April 2, 2019

Randy and Brady with Ted Cox. Picking up from where we left off last week about the end of Ted's Vietnam experience and coming back into civilian life.

RB: Tell me again how it came about that you got back to the United States, about checking out and out processing

TC: It was pretty simple. We went to a place called a 90th Replacement Depot [Battalion, at Long Binh Post, 20 kilometers north east from Saigon, Vietnam]

and we just breezed through there and we actually, your time is up you've got your orders and you get on this giant plane, do the opposite of what we did to get here. We landed –

RB: Is it a charter plane going back? I forget how that worked then. They had dropped off troops coming in and then it was an empty plane and they were taking the other out or not necessarily?

TC: Yeah. I'm not sure about that, makes sense though.

RB: Tiger? [Flying Tiger Line was a scheduled cargo airline used for troops during the Vietnam War.]

TC: We didn't really see the news guys coming in.

RB: Oh, okay. But it was a charter flight.

TC: It was a charter flight.

RB: Where did you fly after you left?

TC: The Philippines first.

RB: Clark Field?

TC: For some reason I was at the head of the line and for some reason the man asked, "Do you want to be a courier for this mail?" So I had to stay on the aircraft in The Philippines to watch the bags of mail in the airplane. You know how it is, you volunteer for something...

RB: Yeah I know. Extra duties as assigned.

TC: Anyway, got back to Oakland eventually, I landed in Travis [Air Force Base, Alameda County, California] and went to Oakland.

RB: So you didn't go to Hawaii?

TC: Oh, I'm sorry, I had asked a delay in route, I thought it might be a nice little vacation. It turned out not.

RB: Oh, why not?

TC: I got sick, I got a nice motel room.

RB: You said something about you got hives or something?

TC: I think it was nerves that made me break out in hives. That was the weirdest thing I've ever experienced. You don't even know they exist and so, I got back to Travis and then over to Oakland. My parents picked me up.

RB: So you were wearing your uniform when you stepped off the plane.

TC: No, I was [in] civilian clothes.

RB: Oh, civilian clothes. Okay. Anyway, your parents came from where? Where were they living? Salt Lake?

TC: No, Santa Cruz.

RB: They came, drove over and picked you up. You hadn't seen them for –

TC: I hadn't seen them for the whole 14 months. I did not take an R&R [Rest & Recuperation]. The way that the war turned out, they really had just X number of aviation people that were doing their job. Almost all of the infantry was gone back to the states and what we used for infantry there to do the battles were the South Vietnamese army.

RB: Okay.

TC: There are a lot of different emotions, mixed emotions about the South Vietnamese Army. But I had all kinds of respect for these guys because they, I think, finally realized that they were fighting for their country. They had to get it done. The commandos and the special service troops that were there in Vietnam came to the Battle of An Loc. An Loc was a really neat French-built town, built by the French. They built really nice houses that had tile roofs and everything, French architecture. It was left in rubbles after the battle.

RB: Oh, man. So when was that battle?

TC: That battle took place Easter of '72 [1972].

RC: Okay, that was part of the Spring Offensive.

TC: Today is April 2nd, it took place about November, however many [years ago].

RB: Yeah, 47 years ago.

TC: It was a heck of a battle because of the Russian tanks and the troops from North Vietnam. It really wasn't a lot of Viet Cong stuff, it was Regular Army [North Vietnamese Army (NVA)]. We flew over one time, by accident, an entire armor outfit, where they had cannons and you could see the little cannons, as we flew right over the top of them at about telephone [pole] height. That's how we traveled then, was fast and low. If you got up too high and went slow, they had the surface, or shoulder-mounted rockets, heat-seeking rockets. They were getting people like that.

The end of my time there came. I took small vacations, you might say, breaks, but I didn't take an R&R which was usually a month, and you go home for a month but I wasn't able to arrange that.

RB: You were saying at that time the crews were kind of short manned.

TC: Especially the crew engineers, the crew chiefs. I think I was basically the crew chief of four helicopters instead of one. So I was pretty busy. In fact everybody was pretty busy. Anyway, finally my time came—

RB: So you were saying that you had mixed emotions, you thought, when you were coming home.

TC: Yeah, everybody did.

RB: So, what were you feeling?

TC: Well, we had heard all these things about the crowds throwing things and all that.

RB: Did you encounter any of that?

TC: Well, I got there in between I guess, they were resting.

RB: So, you missed all that.

TC: Besides that it was like in the middle of the night.

RB: So nobody met you at the [airport]—

TC: Well, we had dreamt about the steak that they were supposed to cook you when you got there, the special thing in Oakland.

RB: Oh yeah, did you experience that?

TC: It was the toughest piece of meat I ever had.

RB: So much for that steak dinner.

TC: Paper plate with plastic forks. They did it, but you know. I had to kinda like wake people up to make us, two of us were in that particular —

RB: It wasn't the ideal [of a] welcome.

TC: My parents as I say picked me up, got me back to Scotts Valley which is in Santa Cruz, the mountains of California, the redwood trees.

RB: So did you spend some time to decompress?

TC: That's what I wanted to do in Hawaii but it didn't happen. I finally got back and I was pretty much okay, but my whole family caught some kind of bronchial flu, so here I was running back and forth taking care of them. My brother, my sister was already married, my brother was there —

RB: This was your brother, Gregory [Cox]?

Tc: Gregory, he was 12 years younger than I was, and I was right then just 21. My mother and father were just absolutely sick in their bed. I took care of them for a couple of weeks and didn't catch anything and when they were better, I caught it. I remember laying on the couch in the living room, feeling miserable and watching the major baseball thing that they play at the end when everybody's won already and then they get their teams together [for the World Series]. So that was my first time of watching any sports.

RB: Cause, this was September of '72 [1972] that you finished Vietnam. So we're getting close to the play-offs and then to the World Series.

TC: Yea, I do remember spending the World Series watching the Oakland As beat everybody and it continued on. They were the champs for a quite a while. Here I was “go” [raising hand as a cheer], that’s my team.

RB: Right, your hometown team.

TC: It’s great to be on the winning side. Makes it enjoyable that way. I finally got better.

RB: So what did you do after you got back?

TC: Well, I was on the second portion of my obligation was two years of well, they call it inactive reserve and then another two years after that of even less active duty.

RB: So in the two years of inactive reserve did you actually have to show up at anything?

TC: I didn’t.

RB: Just be on call in case?

TC: I didn’t. But I was on call and it was a little more formal and then the last two years, nobody cares.

RB: Yeah, you just disappear.

TC: My goal was to get two years of college, go back to active service and volunteer and go to the flight training and become a warrant officer. And I did everything just according to my goal.

RB: Okay. Where’d you go to college?

TC: I went to a junior college close to us that’s called Cabrillo College. It’s got an ocean view, it’s a really nice place.

RB: It’s in Monterey [Monterey County, California]?

TCL No, in Santa Cruz [Santa Cruz County, California].

RB: Oh, it is in Santa Cruz. Okay. So you finished two years of JC, Junior College. Did that qualify you to get back in. Is that enough education to—

TC: It did. I didn’t have to seek out a degree, a two year degree because my goal was to continue on and get a bachelor’s degree in aeronautics. I was thinking of going to Embry-Riddle [Aeronautical University].

RB: Right, and you could do that while you were on active duty?

TC: They do, they let you have time off for, to finish your bachelors. But anyway, I got enough credits and went back and told them about it and reapplied for flight school. I got it right away and — .

RB: Great, so this is 1975, right?

TC: Yeah, this is '75 [1975]. I did get married in the interim.

RB: You didn't marry — . Lori? I have you having gotten married in April, '77 [1977]. You went to a couple years of college. '73 [1973], '74 [1974], into '75 1975]. So in '75 [1975] went on active duty or you were still –

TC: I finished the college then I took a two year, then I went on a [LDS] mission.

RB: Yea, tell me about that. You said you joined the church in '73 [1973]. Tell me how that came about.

TC: Well, I was sick and then Thanksgiving [Day] came along and it was my next-door neighbors who were my cousins. They introduced me to a young lady who was visiting them and she was getting ready to go on her mission. She told me about the church and I really embraced that. It was really at a great time.

RB: I forget. Did you grow up in any kind of a religious home?

TC: No.

RB: So this was a new thing for you?

TC: When I was tiny, my grandmother would take me to [Baptist Church] sunday school. We didn't have any type of religion. Although we were pretty civilized. My folks, they were pretty good people.

RB: Good people, well they sound like it. So, you joined the church and you also were going to college. You said you went on a mission in there.

TC: That snuck in. Snuck that in. I figured they didn't care where I was.

RB: The military in your inactive, inactive reserve. Where did you go on your mission?

TC: I went to Roanoke, Virginia. It's so neat there. I'm one that loves a lot of birds singing.

RB: The eastern seaboard is certainly a great place.

TC: I spent the year in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, so I was familiar with that area. Although, we just played army out in the woods and the big fields. Did a lot of jumping then.

RB: Roanoke is more a Navy town. Norfolk and – No, no, no, Roanoke is on the western side of the state, actually in the Appalachian area.

TC: It is. My companion and I went up to the Blue Ridge Parkway. It was so neat.

RB: It's great. My first assignment in the [United States] Air Force was actually in [Middle] Tennessee. In Middle Tennessee, there's an Air Force installation there but we used to go into Virginia and up toward D.C. and we'd go along that Blue Ridge Parkway and eastern Tennessee. Yeah, that is wonderful country.

TC: I remember one episode in the Blue Ridge Mountains where we stopped for gas, went in, and there was an old timer playing the dulcimer. He was selling them but I didn't have enough money to buy one. It was my first exposure and it was great music. Kind of a instrumental. Kind of a banging on the strings. It just sounded great. I came home and I got ready to go back in. We were married [at the time].

RB: How did you meet Lori?

TC: At [a] Thanksgiving [Day] dinner at my cousin's house. Her mother had been friends of my mother, I didn't know that until a time later. Small world. She lived in Chico. At that time I got a job with a pretty neat building firm. I was working as a finish carpenter. I did that as my time went on with my desire to go to, start all over, go to another school where I had to polish myself. I didn't think of that though. I thought of flying because I love flying and I really felt like that was my thing to do. So I got ready, had to do a zillion things again, paperwork, take days of going here and there with paperwork in Oakland. Finally [I] got all set. Now I did mention that I got married. We got orders to go and they came –.

.RB: Did you get a break in service then or no? Did you finish this enlistment and then immediately start in this.

TC: The end of my first enlistment would be, let's see I went in ,70 [1970], so it should be easy to figure out.

RB: Right. Six years.

TC: Yeah, it's a six-year obligation.

RB: So, until '76 [1976].

TC: Yeah, '76 [1976], '77 [1977] is when I got married. I don't know what happened in-between.

RB: Yeah, it doesn't matter. So you got orders and you came on active duty again though.

TC: Yea I went back and put myself into a brand new channel of

RB: Career field. Probably your first orders were to go to a training school. I guess that was in Massachusetts?

TC: Well now, that's where I went when I applied to flight school I had a top secret clearance and I went to, I eventually got to Fort Mead, Maryland and worked with the military service, of the special service, where we handled messages from our spy's in like Russia and stuff like that. It was just a job. I had to be in a job and be in a regular job in order to apply.

RB: Ahhh, to get into for flight training.

TC: To get into flight training. So that's what I did.

RB: Your first orders were to go to Fort Mead?

TC: Yes.

RB: What was your rank then?

TC: I was an E-4 Specialist. So I got my orders to go to flight school, all my friends were all excited. My wife went back and stayed with her mother in California while I went through the first part of the schooling, which required me to live in the barracks, which was the actual warrant officer candidate school. In other words, I had to go through, to be a warrant officer, they were like college courses when they were military. Communication skills, you know I had to learn all about how to be an officer, a warrant officer. I did that and actually became a warrant officer in the process. We started flying. This was down in Alabama.

RB: So when did you become a Warrant Officer?

TC: I became a warrant officer in 1980, does that sound right chronologically.

RB: Yeah, you were in Fort Mead for a while.

TC: No, I became a warrant officer right after I got married and we had a baby.

RB: Jenna?

TC: Gina was born October '78 [1978]. I hope I'm getting this right. Then we went to, together we went down to Fort Rucker [Dale County, Alabama] and then figured out it'd be better for her to stay with her mom.

RB: Yeah, to help with the baby.

TC: Until I finished that first part which I couldn't come home, I had to stay there 24/7 to finish this first portion.

RB: Yeah, she might as well be with family to help her since you weren't going to be there.

TC: She came out when I finished that first part which was about a year long. We bought a house.

RB: Where, in Fort Rucker?

TC: Yeah, right off base in Fort Rucker and bought a new car. That's the first time I had credit. If you were a warrant officer back then, you were, yeah, your credits good, come on in. I bought a nice little station wagon and we had the little baby. Then I went through flight training [during] that time. I got to get into a little helicopter and learned how to do our normal auto rotations to the ground, pretending the engine went out. That was at the three foot hover, shot the throttle and set down, you had to do a little movement to the controls and also some of the more advanced stuff. Hovering might seem like its nothing, but it takes practice cause all of a sudden the aircrafts going sideways, you're wondering what the heck, you gotta check that out. All that's just so minute, you just think about moving the controls and it responds.

RB: Wow, I can't imagine, that's great.

TC: It became natural to me after a while.

RB: Well you already knew how to fly, so you had some aeronautical sense about it [you].

TC: Flying was my whole life. Starting with my dad training me when I was a little boy. My whole goals in life, my whole academic goal, was to fly. Period. I kind of dreamed of Alaska bush flying, that never came. We even had relatives up there that had married into the Aleut families and could barely speak English. So, I have these relatives who speak pigeon English and "come up, come up, you fly, you fly" They wanted me to fly supplies to their stores that they had.

BF: Bush whackers are kind of crazy though when it comes to pilots. From what I've known, some of them that I've known.

TC: After experiencing tail draggers landings in the field with my dad and then flying the helicopter into little holes in the trees, land down there, You know I qualified for the bush stuff.

Laughter.

TC: Except for the ice and cold. I don't know. I rather not stay for that.

RB: You went through your first course at Fort Rucker. Was the follow on course there as well?

TC: It was back to back. Started immediately.

RB: Learning how to fly a helicopter?

TC: It was a different stage. We were considered the ultimate. We had the special insignia and all the other candidates saluted us. We were the high and mighty while we learned to fly. Cause we were cool, we wore these sun glasses.

RB: [Laughter]. What kind of helicopters?

TC: We started out, with the little Hughes. It was actually, gosh they don't even have them now. It was like the little Hughes 300, two place, a regular motor, air plane engine, six cylinder and a three blade rotor on top.

BF: OH-9 Cayuse, right? Which was the Hughes MD 300, military variant anyways.

TC: But that changed, this was the little brother to that [inaudible] because the Hughes 500. They were using the OH-6. six in Vietnam for Scouts at that time, that's what I became, a Scout. With all my knowledge and what they call a feeling in a sense of air, sensing where you are, because I learned when I was a kid. I was always aware, we could fly over that mountain and get home. Or follow the highway.

Laughter.

RB: That's smart. After you finished your helicopter training, did you go to Fort Ord? Is that the next step?

TC: Yes, the reason we bought the home was because they told me they were going to make me a turnaround instructor.

RB: Was that at Fort Rucker? Did that happen?

TC: My wife's father became ill with stomach cancer. He was still living in Oakland. We were, instead of letting me go through that instructor's course and staying there teaching. We rented out the house, we got a place as close to Fort Ord, Monterey, [California] as close as we could to her dad. And that played out over a period of time when he died.

RB: What was your job at Fort Ord then?

TC: My job at Fort Ord was flying for the cavalry, that was a ready reaction course,

RB: What did they do?

TC: We practiced Scout maneuvers and played Army down in the, around Monterey and further down by Camp Irwin, Fort Irwin [San Bernardino County, California].

RB: Fort Irwin near Barstow, the National Training Center, I think.

TC: Down there, that's where I became an aircraft commander. Getting a scout position at a flight school was, that was at the top. There were about six of us, two of them went for Ranger school. They got to fly in the Apache helicopters, the gun ships, that's the cream of the whole thing, we got the next coolest, the job telling them where to go. You get the Cobras behind you, you locate the enemy and you sneak back and put them in position and come around. Being the Scout was the battle captain. You were the battle captain. It was a prestigious thing. So of course, with the sadness of her father being sick, my wife and I thought we did what we needed to do, we'd lived close where we could go visit her dad on weekends and stuff like that. Now, I flew, after a while it looked like I was going to be sent to Germany. Stationed there with the helicopter company. But something happened worldwide. They shot down, they meaning the Communists. Somplace [they] shot down an airliner over in, they said it came over into Chinese airspace. They just went out with jets and blew everybody away and it was a civilian airliner full of people. One of those people was named McDonald, last name of McDonald, he was a congressman, a neat guy. [Lawrence Patton McDonald was a U.S. Congressman who was aboard Korean Airlines Flight 007 when it was shot down on September 1, 1983, by Soviet interceptors in Soviet airspace. There were a lot of politics and feelings. They thought there was going to be an altercation with the North Koreans, because it just looked that way. It was a Korean airline.

BF: Korean Air [Airlines] Flight 770 [KAL 007], I think it is.

TC: Yeah, or double O seven.

BF: Yeah, it's something like that, I know the incident.

TC: Anyway, my orders to Germany were no longer valid. They sent me to Korea by myself. A hardship tour they called it without your family. My family just stayed in the officers housing that we were in. I went to Korea for a year.

RB: A write-up of this was [stated], “In 1983, representative Larry McDonald from Georgia along with 268 other passengers and crew members aboard Seoul-bound Korean airlines flight 007 perished when a Soviet SU 15 interceptor shot down the Boeing 747 230B airliner with a missile near Sakhalin Island [Russia]”.

TC: So the military, they all got, we were all put on a warning to—, we might be going to, this might be it, this is when we are gonna fight the Communists.

BF: World War III.

TC: Yeah, big time.

BF: Where were you when Korea?

TC: Pyeongtaek. It was just south of Seoul. It was interesting, an interesting time to be there. I did real well there and then came back.

RB: One year tour?

TC: Yeah, one year and came back and started my second three year term as the scout in the same place that I was before.

RB: At Fort Ord?

TC: Because I had choose to not go anywhere—choose to stay there. We had sold the house in Alabama. We changed our plans. How’s this for a \$37,000 home? One acre, beautiful home, everything, terrazzo kitchen and baths, which is like a marble.

RB: Where was that, what town? Salinas?

TC: It was just. That was, I’m thinking back in Alabama. The house and I just wanting to put in that we bought it for \$37,000 and our payments were like \$235. The actual proximity to the base was really great. You get on this one road and it goes right in there. That’s at work. I just wanted to put that in there.

RB: Good, yeah.

TC: It was just a really nice place. You had to deal with fire ants and copperheads [snakes].

RB: That’s true. [Laughter] And hurricanes occasionally.

TC: A hurricane hit right after we left. Tore off part of the roof. We had a lady who worked for C-21 [Century 21] managing the home for us and she had the roof replaced. I was, I don’t like those things. I would rather have a good old-fashioned earthquake.

RB: I agree with you.

TC: Everybody I talked to had a great fear of earthquakes even though they hadn't experienced one. Oh, we can handle these tornadoes.

RB: Oh, no thanks. Okay, so you are back doing your scout duties at Fort Ord.

TC: Got back to Fort Ord. I didn't have to go into battle, it didn't work out that way. In fact, I didn't, I didn't follow it, I didn't follow what they were doing. I was so busy at my level you're focused on what you're doing. So I got home.

RB: This would have been 1984 by this point?

TC: We had another baby in '82 [1982].

RB: Right, well the incident—

TC: In flight school we had a baby and then after I got home in 1982, Alicia was born at the military hospital there near Monterrey. I was on track as far as my career was concerned. Then I started getting some input from my brother who was a contractor saying the time is right for building. You've gotta come and your gonna make it. He was a general contractor, and I got my general contractors license in the last year of my active duty and then I became a builder.

RB: So you finished three years at that assignment and then you separated.

TC: I was automatically going to have some civilian time anyway. Or I should say some reserve time.

RB: So, you didn't get out of the military you just went into the reserves?

TC: I went into what they called the—I'm not going to be able to remember it. Anyway it was special reserve that officers and high ranking NCO's can get. You do your job whatever job it is you chose to do and you do have to do something every year. Go down and play army and report in.

RB: Like for two weeks or something?

TC: It was barely two weeks, I think it was twelve [days] —

RB: You didn't have to go once a month for a weekend or something like that. None of that.

TC: No, it didn't require that. You were pretty much left to your civilian job. Okay, so I thought I was gonna make it big as a contractor. I was always looking up at the airplanes thinking, man I can be out of here. So that's what I did, I went back and forth. That's my career. Back and forth. I've got three babies. I had everything ready to go. I had my license to build and I had the skills, and all the tools and everything. Did that for a while and then it kind of —I can't quite remember what all we did after that. After that it was kind of a blur.

RB: Yeah. Well, you wound [ended] up splitting with your wife at some point right?

TC: Yeah, in '85 [1985]. That was a difficult period of time. I wasn't quite ready for it, [I] didn't know that was gonna happen until I got the papers.

RB: Did your girls want to stay with her then?

TC: Oh yeah, they stayed with their mom, which was appropriate. They ended up staying fairly close by.

RB: So you were able to see them as they were growing up?

TC: Yeah, my wife remarried and I was building, in fact I was building some big million dollar homes right down the street from where they lived. So for a few years I got to see them quite a bit. Anyway, the hardships came. The crying, feeling so bad about not being able to tuck my babies in. Very hard time.

RB: Through all this—you came home from Vietnam in '72 [1972]—did you experience any kind of PTSD along the way there in the 70's and 80's.

TC: I was raised very strictly. My father would hit me hard. I would just have these huge lumps on the head and I had a lot of concussions. I don't really like to bring that time up, but in order to explain the PTSD, I pretty much had a lot of traumas by the time I got to the point of just working by my crew. Kind of wondering what hit me. That type of thing. I ran into a lot of guys in the same boat.

RB: How did it manifest itself with you? What did you experience in your life?

TC: I experienced a lot of replays of the chances that we took. And we did, we took many. Getting that Distinguished Flying Cross was one example of what we did every day. You don't get a medal every day. They give you one or two medals while you are there for your year and half or whatever. That's what you get. They're not going like, hey, you did something great today. That's the way it is. A lot of guys did some super things. We saved a lot of people. I was in the medevac [unit]. They were in our hands for a period of time after we picked them up in the battle. [We] tried to quiet them down which was almost impossible in the helicopter, flying over trees like this [waiving arm in a figure eight to indicate flying erratically], getting shot at all the time.

RB: So you're reliving some of these experiences later on?

TC: Well, my whole life of experiences. My dad of course was a champion Jiu jitsu, judo type of guy. [He held] some championships. He was northern California champion for two years. Anyway, I did a lot of Chinese boxing. We trained in Japanese [martial] arts. I got interested in the Chinese arts, so I would be knocked out on a regular basis. When you get kicked in the side of the head it's not easy [difficult] at all to just be gone. Bang, even though, it's full contact, you have a helmet on which doesn't do anything as far as shock is concerned.

RB: So it's not like in the movies where you just get right up and move around?

TC: That's always amazed me watching the movies and watching guy who let the other guy get up. That's contrary to Chinese belief. You knock him down, you're on top of him, you finish him off. You don't wait for him to get up and—

RB: And do it again.

TC: I hated that in the movies. I did have a lot of concussions over my period of life. I've suffered a lot of emotional agony being where I couldn't be with my children. Being in a place where it was a good place for the weather and everything was concerned, but it just was way too many obligations, too much pressure, and I was not sleeping at night. I was getting these nightmares.

RB: Do you suffer from depression or—

TC: I went through, yeah, oh yeah. I think everybody that goes through a divorce suffers depression. It's what it's meant, it's how you define depression. If you work it backwards, you know reverse engineering, you'll find out.

RB: Anxiety at all?

TC: Oh yeah. Depression, anxiety. You know, the old "woulda, coulda, shoulda." If I could have avoided that, blah blah blah. So, eventually I left building. I returned again to the Army. [I] spent some time with my skills. I was with this one unit, [where] I taught the Pathfinders School. I didn't teach the school. I taught one little phase [of it].

RB: Where was that?

TC: [That was in] Georgia, Fort Benning [Chattahoochee County]. It was only for a short time —

[END OF RECORDING THREE.]

TC: — because I didn't want to make obligations. So I came back and got onto civilian status again.

RB: Alright. When you went back on active duty at different points, did that help you deal with some of the other aspects of your personal life that were goin' on? Were you doing something that you loved?

TC: It did. I actually loved being in the Army. Every day you knew what you're going to do and knew what you're supposed to do. If you had confidence in yourself, which I did, you can get that mission accomplished and continue on. I loved being expected to do everything right. Period.

RB: So there was more structure, I would imagine, than being a contractor where you have an end goal, get the concrete done, get the sides of the building up and the roof on — .

TC: The nightmare of construction is when the lady of the house wants to change the number of bedrooms or wants a bathroom over there instead, or wants the kitchen moved four feet. You've got to take everything apart, all your plumbing. Then once you get up to where you're getting some color put in the house. "Oh, no. I have these new colors we want to have the baby's room in plum purple and we want the library in bright yellow." Okay, I did that and they go, AHFFFH." We don't want it that way, we want like half of that much of color." So even though I told them, they didn't want to hear that.

RB: Whereas in the Army or the military in general, they are much more structured.

TC: I wouldn't run into problems like that. Especially wanting to not take advantage of the people. I was a little too nice. I wasn't really a good businessman. I gave away the store too often.

RB: Yeah, I hear you.

TC: So, I wasn't the most successful contractor.

RB: That's what I mean in being a businessman and running your own life, its much more open-ended. Whereas the Army—[it] is very discrete. You have an objective by the end of the week. All the points that get you there in a class. You have a checklist of things to do when you get into an aircraft and it s boom, boom, boom. You know what you're supposed to do. It doesn't change as much as dealing with clients, dealing with other subcontractors, I would imagine. So open-ended and you are always having to adjust.

TC: It's very neat in a way. All of a sudden you're building a home way back in the woods and you have all these critters coming around. There wasn't any bear in the mountains there but there were all kinds of cougars and stuff like that.

RB: Speaking of the woods, you told me last week that you spent a number of years just kind of away from civilization or the city.

TC: That came next in the chronological order.

RB: So you got out of the Army one last time or something. And—

TC: Basically, yeah.

RB: How many total years of active duty did you have?

TC: I got my last honorable discharge in '90 [1990] or it might have been '91 [1991]. I was still building and I remember seeing the war in the newspaper. The Gulf War was going to start.

RB: Yeah, August of 1990.

TC: Well, I had to check in because I was on this Ready Reserve.

RB: That's right, that's what it's for.

TC: So I called back east and they said, "Well, we'll go check." I was on hold for a while. They came up and said, "Sir you got your last final discharge thirty days ago. Do you want to sign back up?" I said, "No, thank you." I wasn't ready to go to war again.

RB: By this time, you're thirty-nine or forty years old.

TC: Yeah, I could have, and probably my buddies, they were so crazy, they did. I just [really] didn't want to do it.

RB: Did you ultimately retire from the Army? Did you get enough years either [either] the reserve?

TC: No, I don't have — I'm not retired, I'm disabled. I got the same money as if I retired. I didn't have the disability on my plan. You know what I mean.

RB: Not what I was striving for. That was your end point.

TC: There's a cute saying that somebody is planning and somebody is living their reality. What do you do when you're planning, how do you live your life? That's what life is. It's actually what happens, it's not what you plan. I was caught off guard. I stopped flying helicopters. I would go and rent a little airplane now and then just to keep my license up. I went to—Okay here I am. —I get the flu and we were working for my brother's big company. I was so sick for about six days, and then I called the office and said, "What doctor do we have in the insurance thing [plan] for me to go to. I think I'm gonna die. I was sick as a dog. They said, "Oh, you go to this doctor over here." Before that I had kept up my medical certificate by going to this doctor in Walnut Creek there. He was a good doctor, he gave me my eye exam each year. But you have to do that every year in order to keep the commercial rating. So I went to this doctor, out of the blue. I didn't go to my doctor, I went to a different doctor. You fill out this stuff and he takes it and you get called in. He's looking at this stuff and said, "Do you realize that your doctor is a gynecologist?" [Laughter] But he was also a flight surgeon. That's what I had looked up in the phone book, flight surgeon, I didn't look up doctors, and "Oh, here's a gynecologist." No wonder there was only women in the waiting room.

All: Laughter

RB: They must have thought, "What's he doing here?"

TC: Anyway, the doctor says, like, "Huh." Finally, I told him and it was a good laugh. That's one of the really funny things that happened to me in this life. He was a good doctor though. Good bedside manner so to speak.

BF: Do you miss flying now, just in general?

TC: Well, here's the thing. I learned about PTSD. I read a pamphlet and it blew my mind that I was everything that the thing [pamphlet] said.

RB: Really? That's what you had experienced?

TC: Through the divorce, through all the hard times. I'm really wondering what I'm going to do in my life. It just overwhelms me that I am actually disabled. You get the counseling and then you try to set up a list of things that trigger your mood. [You] try to avoid those things. I had trouble with road rage, so I took the bus for two years. [Laughter]

RB: Oh, yeah, let someone else drive.

TC: Had to, and it felt so good. I sat and watched things go by there and then I'd get off. Who the heck wants to be in one of those cars with everybody trying to kill you. [Laughter] Anyway, that happened. You might notice some trend of crazy

things happening [in my life story.] I started going to counseling once a week with the VA about the being so blue, and so despondent. I was so worried about my children all the time. I wanted to be a father to them. But someone else was being a father to them. So I was the other father, kind of. At least I got to see them. Even when they were living in New York I would fly out or drive [and see them].

RB: Do you still have a relationship with your daughters?

TC: Oh, absolutely. I lived in Provo, they went through college. They all had a scholarship.

RB: Good for them. They went to BYU [Brigham Young University] then?

TC: Oh, yeah. My kids are really brilliant. Straight A stuff. They got that from their mother, I guess.

RB: Well, you did pretty good when you went through [your coursework]—

TC: That's what people say, but I didn't actually have grades.

RB: Well, you passed certain things at the top of your class in early training.

TC: That's true when you analyze that.

BF: Aviation school is pretty hard.

TC: But when you have the desire to go through that thing, you stay so focused. I really answered all the questions and cooperated and graduated.

RB: So when did you kind of separate yourself from the modern world, if you will?

TC: After I got the kids to the point where they were married, not that I got them to that point, but that became the fact, they were married.

RB: I call it when you've launched your kids. They're able to take care of themselves. Then you don't have that responsibility.

TC: Absolutely. Then it's a whole different program, oh gosh, I love my kids.

RB: But they don't need you in the same way anymore.

TC: But, I was already introduced to that. So they're pretty independent. Of course, their mom and I were in touch, if one of them wanted to run away, [laughter], They go through that 12 year [old], 15 [year old], oh my gosh when they were 15. I don't know how I lived through that. Then they would come out from upstate New York and visit me. Stuff like that. I had this one job that I was making these old buildings into a western town. Putting the saloon sign up, [and the] the sheriff's office. All the other things. While I was doing that, the guy who owned it was a big horse guy. He had horses everywhere. And he had a school of horsemanship. So I got the three girls enrolled in the school. They came to work with me in the morning and they went to the training. I did that with them one summer. It taught them a skill that only people dream of. It's a lot more difficult

to deal with a horse than what it shows in the movies. Some horses are very crazy. I forgot to say, I grew up with a horse by the way. My sister and I each had a horse and mine was the best, hers was the worst. That was the reality of it. That was a good time and I enjoyed doing something for them and helping them go through that— the horsemanship training. Gosh, they had to learn all the parts of the horse, and the gear and the saddle. They knew more than I did when they got out of that class.

RB: You were living in Provo at that time?

TC: I was living in California building homes. Each time I wanted to go build homes, I went back to California. I had my license was in California. I sent my kids back east and I went through all this business things. Business can be tough. People treat you differently when they owe you money. I didn't like business at all. I started— I've always been— I want to say I was more of an outdoorsman. I've never been a sportsman. I've never done anything for sport in the wilderness, but I've considered myself a very, very learned outdoorsman. Woodsman. Really in the full sense of the word. I grew up with guns, a big gun cabinet, I went shooting whenever I wanted to. I hiked down a little trail and I'm in the wilderness. And I did that. And I started living in the—first of all—I lived in campgrounds.

RB: Whereabouts?

TC: I got a card that allowed me to go and stay at any of the state parks in California for thirty days. You could skip a day and stay again another thirty days. I went to each one. I'm telling you, it was something else. They were all different. One was right on the ocean, where the ocean's pounding. And then you [try to] sleep. [It was hard.] I got away from there. Nice to look at. I was one with the sea. I was a scuba diver. That was one of the new skills I learned. I could take my little inflatable out.

RB: You had gotten your disability rating by this point?

TC: No.

RB: How were you surviving financially?

TC: I would just do a small job now and then. It didn't take a lot of money to live this way. I was avoiding costs of money. I didn't have rent. I didn't pay anything practically to the park people. I got to know a lot of the park rangers and managers. I almost wanted to do that but then never did. I'm glad I didn't. So then, I got a little wilder and wilder. Staying out longer. I only kind of came back to reality when my kids—when it was their time to come out in the summer.

RB: So when you're doing this, did it give you a better piece of mind, I guess, getting away from some of the stressful, depressive, anxious parts of yourself?

TC: I was using isolation to deal with my problems.

RB: Did it work?

TC: No.

- RB: You still had some of these issues going on? And you're in your thoughts a lot more because you're not around other people
- TC: Oh, yeah, basically. It was a difficult time. My kids were going to school back east in their high school and I was missing them so much. I decided to just stay there, stay out in the mountains. I literally did it for decades at a time. All I studied was survival skills. The whole thing, how to make a fire every which way. How to live there.
- RB: Did you maintain a sense of spirituality while you were there or during this period of your life? Did you feel a presence of God or you know a higher being around you? Not so much?
- TC: No. Everything was just easier to do if I took this trail instead of that trail. I was avoiding the hard things. It was difficult to take on these difficult things. But then finally I remarried. That's when my troubles started. [Laughter] I came out the woods and I remarried.
- RB: You said that you tended to be someone who got hooked up with fixer uppers, that's how you described it. You were trying to fix them, help them, solve their problems?
- TC: I had a problem with that. It kind of worked the other way around too. My first encounter was marrying a lady with four children who really needed a husband and needed someone to love her. Her children were great. It was easy at first. Then they went back to their old problem ways and I had no power over that. So I ran for my life, so to speak. There was no way I could deal with someone's alcoholism.
- RB: Sucked down this rabbit hole and you had your own issues.
- TC: I was already down in the rabbit hole. So, then I divorced again. It was easier the second time. Then I went, I pretty much stayed in the Santa Cruz mountains. That's what I knew well. Then I decided to try some—I wanted to go back to flying but I never really did get to that point. But I did go through a period of time where I studied aeronautics. There's a lot to know. I was gonna go back to flying again [and] be a pilot for hire. But I did not make it. Being divorced, you have a lot of obligations [and] financial stuff. I was already paying that for the kids. My life after that was pretty easy to just describe. I practiced survival. I wanted to open a survival school. I knew how to do it. But I didn't. I didn't start the school, I just kept training harder and harder.
- RB: When did you submit your application to VA for disability then? About how long ago was that?
- TC: 1988 was the first time I learned about it. I went to a man and talked with him for a while. He asked me—because I told him I'd read certain books. [I asked him], "What do you think, how do you feel about your own disability?"

[END OF RECORDING FOUR.]

TC: He had been through it all and became a veterans — I was going to say social worker, but that's not what he was. He became a V.A. [Veterans Administration] counselor for —

RB: To assist people in —.

TC: — people in PTSD.

RB: Oh, I see. So he was like a therapist kind of counselor?

TC: Yeah, in traumatic brain injury.

RB: Yes.

TC: So, I really fit in to their description. I went ahead and saw people one at a time. I went through a couple of groups and I wasn't comfortable. I would rather deal with it [this way], "Okay, I come and see you every week, or whatever, for an hour."

RB: Right.

TC: That was what I did for a long time.

RB: You kind of talk about where you were? Would you go back in time and talk about what happened to you? Try to make sense of it?

TC: That is basically what they want, they want you to open up, basically what we just went through now.

RB: Yeah.

TC: Of course, I couldn't repeat the stories, so we wandered all over within my lifetime.

RB: Right.

TC: Focusing on this and focusing on that.

RB: Was that a positive experience for you to be able to talk to someone about it?

TC: Yeah, it opened my mind to the reality of the world. Okay, here it is and I am either going to be a recovering person—I did everything right up to a certain point.

RB: Right. [Laughter]

TC: And I didn't want to lose that— didn't want to lose the fact that I had control at one point. But you don't really have control over other people.

RB: True.

TC: You are your own, and one and only —.

RB: That's true.

TC: — as far as influence. Hey now, you are not acting like a proper soldier. [Laughter]

BF: [Laughter]

TC: You can't do that [to people]. So, it was hard. Now, I can see what [an] ideal person—she [my ideal mate] was in the Army, or something. Some way to associate with military life. That's just too much to hope for. [Laughter] I went to dances and stuff and met a lot of great people. One last time, I had a short [marriage]. Well, I [we] got an annulment, that's how short it was.

RB: Okay.

TC: Then I stopped going to the dances and I just went into isolation for quite a few years. I was living in the mountains here when they called me to come here. I have been here a year and four months.

RB: Oh, so really quite recently you were kind of off on your own.

TC: I was camping for twenty years.

RB: Right.

TC: Quite a camping trip.

RB: Yeah. [Laughter]

TC: A lot of that. I brought my kids.

RB: Oh, that's true .

TC: They would come with the grandkids.

RB: Okay.

TC: They would visit me and we'd be in the camping mode.

RB: Right. Do you still talk to your brother?

TC: He is so busy that I get to talk to him once in awhile.

RB: How about your sister, Gail?

TC: Yes, she is also busy with her life.

RB: Right, but you still have a relationship with both of them at times?

TC: Yes, it has been difficult since my dad died. She was the trustee and it has been difficult her dealing honestly with me.

RB: I see, sure. Is your mother still living?

TC: My mom passed away, probably, six years ago.

RB: I see. As far as your close relatives, it's your brother and sister and then your three kids?

TC: Three daughters and nine grandchildren.

RB: Nine grandchildren. Okay.

TC: It will fill up your plate. It will.

RB: Absolutely.

TC: I was at a clinic here in St. George [Washington County, Utah] doing my medical thing, getting whatever I had to do, and a young lady came up to me and asked me if I knew about the [Southern Utah] Veterans Home in Ivins [Washington County, Utah].

RB: Right.

TC: There is where we are now.

RB: You are at the V. A. clinic?

TC: Down here in St. George there is a clinic. You go to that clinic for medical help.

RB: For V. A.? It is over by the [Red Cliffs] Mall?

TC: Yeah. And they truck you up to Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah] if you need to go [there].

RB: Right, right. Someone there suggested —.

TC: It is a horrendous experience riding in those vans that have no springs.

RB: Oh. [Laughter] That's awful! [Laughter]

TC: Buckboards of the old West!

RB: Yeah, sure!

BF: [Laughter]

TC: Here we are sitting in the back seat, one foot off the seat when they hit a bump!

RB: Oh, no! That's awful!

TC: Half of us have bad backs.

RB: [Laughter] Right!

TC: Going all the way up there made us worse.

RB: Yeah, really. You had different problems.

TC: Anyway, so I came here.

RB: And you have been here about a year, you said?

TC: About a year and four months.

RB: Okay.

TC: The lady used to work here. She said, "Come over and I will give you a tour." So I did that. That's been like three years ago. I really liked it. I said, "Hey, this is a

lot better than the one in California.” I didn’t realize it, but I didn’t have to spend a dime to come here.

RB: Right.

TC: So I am still receiving my four grand [\$4,000].

RB: For disability, retirement and then —.

TC: I buy things for my kids —

RB: That’s great!

TC: — to camp with.

RB: There you go! [Laughter]

TC: I said I hope it’s fun. Everything you see is an application or a catalog that has camping stuff. I don’t know how many tents and sleeping bags they have now.

RB: [Laughter] That’s good.

TC: But it is a lot. I figure you gotta help your neighbor, too.

RB: There you go.

TC: So anyway, that is what gives me a lot of joy. I have been doing that all along even though I was out in the woods.

RB: Let me ask you—[and] we will kind of close up here—if you had to look back at your life now—what are you? You are sixty-eight [years old]?

TC: Sixty-eight in May.

RB: In May [2019]. What has been the positive thing or things in your life as you look back? Have you had some good things?

TC: Yeah, of course, church has been one of the most positives.

RB: Right.

TC: And the way that the military teaches you things has been one of my most favorite [things]. I could go spend an hour and really, really show you the method of teaching that they have worked out and how good it is.

RB: Okay, yeah.

TC: In class you have a workbook. [The workbook] is not just all static words. It’s got basically what the guy is talking about and then it has these blanks. You fill in the blanks as the guy is speaking.

RB: Right.

TC: Then he stops and you go over that. He emphasizes the key words. I’ll tell you what, you take a multiple guess test, you are going to do it. You are going to get every one.

RB: That enforces the learning?

TC: Yeah. That way. Because of that, I graduated at the top of every school. I literally aced all kinds of tests.

RB: You figured it out, how to learn.

TC: You can't goof around like most of the other members did and go out on the weekend to destroy yourself.

RB: [Laughter] Right!

TC: And expect yourself to be able to handle it Monday and Tuesday. You are pretty much gone. Anyway, no, I figured out how to do it.

RB: Okay. Good.

TC: And I did it. Now, I feel like spiritually, I feel a lot better here.

RB: Do you?

TC: We have our own Branch [of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] here.

RB: That is what I understand.

TC: You get up and go to church. In two minutes you are there.

RB: Right.

TC: Walk down to the [meeting room] —.

RB: That's good.

TC: You could basically be in your pajamas, but nobody notices.

BF: [Laughter]

TC: I haven't tried that yet!

RB: No. [Laughter]

TC: This has been good, coming here. All my needs are met, and some. They come in and do things for me. The bed just didn't do the job. I didn't feel comfortable. They went out and bought me a special bed with two inches of memory foam.

RB: Excellent.

TC: See that pad up there?

RB: Yeah, right.

TC: I had that on my other bed and they said, "You can't have that because you don't have a way of washing it." You have to have one that is plastic underneath.

RB: So they got that for you?

TC: You can take the sheets off and wash it with some sort of [disinfectant], no sweat.

RB: What I was going to say, we will go ahead and close right here. I appreciate you kind of sharing your story and just your time in Vietnam and the other military time, but your whole story which all comes together. I appreciate this.

TC: Do you guys want to lose your survival?

RB: Yeah. [Laughter] Alright, thanks.

[END OF RECORDING]