RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DONALD FELL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY
JANUARY 5, 2018

TRANSCRIPT BY

FANTASTIC TRANSCRIPTS

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Donald Fell on January 5, 2018, in Princeton, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you, Mr. Fell, for arranging this.

Donald Fell: No problem.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

DF: Okay. Well, I was born on November 25, 1943, in Anniston, Alabama, while my father was attending Officer Candidate School at Fort McClellan, which doesn't exist anymore. [Editor's Note: Fort McClellan closed in 1999.] He was stationed there. My mom and dad got married down there and, obviously, that's where I was born.

SI: I would like to hear about both of your parents.

DF: Sure.

SI: Beginning with your father, what do you know about his life and his family background?

DF: Sure. Well, my dad actually had kind of a hardscrabble background. He grew up in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, in a poor family. My brother and I are doing an ancestral thing now with Ancestry.com, but he grew up [there]. There's some issue with who was his real father. So, we're trying to pin that down.

He grew up not far from where I grew up, on Chambers Street in Phillipsburg, New Jersey. He grew up on Washington Street, down in kind of a poorer section of town. He went to high school in P-burg High School and graduated in 1935 and worked and did a variety of things. Then, when the war broke out, he enlisted in the Army with about four of his friends.

He was an enlisted man, rose to corporal, was stationed in Puerto Rico. A colonel there took a shine to him and decided he was officer material and sent him to the OCS up in Alabama. He also then did a training stint in Georgia, training other officers, once he finished OCS. Then, he was shipped overseas with the war.

SI: That was when he joined the 30th Infantry Division.

DF: Yes. He was a replacement in the 30th Division. The 30th Division had replacements of about 125 percent. They're, I think, second or third to the 29th, which went in during D-Day. He did not. He went in thirty-some days after D-Day, but my cousin, who I grew up with and was one of my best friends--he lives in California now--years ago, he found a book called *A Time For Trumpets*. My dad was in a page-and-a-half of this book. [Editor's Note: Charles B. MacDonald originally published his *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* in 1985.]

SI: Wow.

DF: And this book's about that thick. It's all about the Battle of the Bulge. So, what happened was, he was ordered forward as the German *SS* commander that was attacking that part of the lines was coming [forward]. The Germans were trying to get to Antwerp. I don't know how much you know about the Bulge, but my dad took his company off, the 30th Division--he was Company A and C; I don't know whether it was A or C. I don't remember at the moment. He ordered his company off their trucks and immediately engaged with this commander. His name was Peiper, Joachim Peiper. As an SS commander, he was later tried and convicted of war crimes.

My dad did kind of a strategic retreat, met up with a couple of Sherman tanks and they kind of did a strategic retreat. It was in Stoumont, Belgium. They kind of held the line. All around them, the US Engineers were blowing up bridges and things like that to stall the German advance.

I went over there in 2013. I was over there with my daughter and her husband in Paris. I took a train--I had done a little research--from Paris to Liège, Belgium, and then, a commuter train to Aywaille, Belgium, and then, a taxi to Stoumont.

The guy, the fellow, did a whole tour. He took me all around and showed me some of the battlefields and stuff like that. Go ahead.

SI: Was it Stavelot?

DF: No, Stoumont, and the roads were very narrow. It reminded me of where I grew up in P-burg, the Delaware-Lehigh Valley. The Delaware and the Lehigh come together there. It's the edge of the Appalachians, very steep hills and things like that, going down to the river. It was the Amblève River that flows through there. So, anyway, the topography, narrow roads--I could see why they were able to stymie this *SS* commander.

Again, the Germans were driving for Antwerp, to seize the oil depot there and to cut the Allies' line in half. They overran a lot of different companies and platoons and stuff, but, again, he did a stalling tactic. He disappears from the book, and I've been doing other research to find out exactly [what happened]. From then, when they stopped the Germans and beat them back--and I don't mean just my dad, but the Allies--he fought on through Germany until the end of the war. He was a decorated veteran. He was awarded the Silver and the Bronze Stars, Silver being the third and the Bronze being the fourth-highest combat medal you can win. He was wounded, so, he got the Purple Heart.

So, I didn't know that much about it growing up as a kid, but I started recently going through his stuff and asking him about it. He didn't want to talk about it. He was my Scoutmaster up there at one time, but, still, wouldn't. In fact, when I took up hunting at one time, he said, "You can go take a hunting course, but," he says, "I'm not going to touch a gun. I'm not going to teach you how to use a gun." I found out later.

In the last two years of his life, I took all of his medals and a lot of the pictures and things like that. I made two big kind of shadowboxes, very large--I had them professionally done--and gave them to him. He put them in his living room.

My dad, he was lucky to get to eighty-five, let's just say that. He had three major heart attacks, he had two cancers, he had a stroke. It started when he was forty-four and I was in college. That was his first major heart attack. That almost killed him.

So, anyway, in the last year or so of his life, and with those things, he started sharing. He was very proud of them. He had them in his living room and, when people came in, he would talk about them, and so forth. So, I learned a lot of the things that I'm telling you now about his combat and that kind of thing, telling me what it was like in combat. So, I think he was very pleased with that.

Again, as I grew up as a kid, he never talked about it. I found all these things. He had a big box up in our attic with all his mementos and all that, the medals and things like that. They weren't prominent as I was growing up at all.

SI: Did he get involved in any veterans' groups?

DF: He was involved for a time with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and that kind of thing, but, then, he got into politics, local politics. He was a city commissioner for several years in P-burg. Then, a close friend of his from high school, Bill (Van Sickle?), was the surrogate and he died suddenly of a massive heart attack at forty-four. My dad ran for that office and won the office. Surrogate is judge, quote, "judge," of the probate court.

So, he had a couple terms at that, and then, he had a heart attack, and was a Republican, by the way. While he was convalescing, his own party ran somebody against him in the primary. That day, we became Democrats. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

DF: So, in any event--and they beat him because he could not campaign.

SI: Sure.

DF: So, I mean, he also had, at one time, for years, he was in the building supply business. He worked for a number of major firms in the local area, lumber companies and that kind of thing. Then, in the '60s, when I was in high school, he started his own little business, his own building supply business, with another fellow that had worked with him in a larger firm. That went on for several years, but, then, with one of the recessions, it basically failed.

I used to do deliveries and stuff for him. It was right in the middle of P-burg. So, it was a kind of mom-and-pop operation, if you will, but, again, in this same time, he was doing the politics and things. Later in life, he worked for a hardware store. He did a number of other things, and then, eventually, he retired.

My mother was running the AAA there, was manager of the AAA in P-burg. He worked for, kind of, her, which we found kind of funny, my two siblings, because he was always the "*paterfamilias*," if you will. So, in any event, then, eventually, [he] completely retired, and my mom and dad would--one of my siblings moved to West Virginia. My sister still lives in Jersey. I moved away, eventually.

After I graduated with a B.A. from Rutgers, I went into the Air Force. I'll tell you a little bit more about that.

SI: Absolutely.

DF: Then, I came out of the Air Force in 1969, after four years in the Air Force as an officer, and went to grad school at Rutgers for Graduate School of Social Work, in community organization, and lived in Plainfield, New Jersey, for several years. Then, my wife, who was originally from Minnesota, wanted to get back to the Midwest. I was working in a group home in Plainfield, New Jersey, for Corrections. I was working for the Department of Corrections in a group home for delinquent kids in Plainfield, New Jersey.

I basically just resigned and we moved to my wife's hometown, which is Winona, Minnesota, which is on the Mississippi. That was kind of a culture shock for me. I mean, I had been there, obviously, off-and-on, but never lived there, and, eventually, found my way. I worked there for a period of time. Then, I eventually made my way and was hired by the YMCA in the Milwaukee area, one of the Ys, and worked there for thirteen years, but I'll tell you more about that.

SI: Absolutely. I have one question before we talk about your mom and her background.

DF: Sure.

SI: When it came time for you to consider your options regarding military service, with the Vietnam War being on, did your father express any opinion?

DF: My dad never pushed me one way or the other. I wanted to--okay, I always wanted to fly. That was something I really, really wanted to do. I was a model builder with my cousin, and so forth, planes, obviously. My dad, actually, because of his politics, was looking into getting me an appointment to the Air Force Academy. I took the physical in my senior year in high school and, at that time, they found out I had astigmatism in my right eye. At that time, at the Academy, if you had that, you could not take flight training.

So, I gave that dream up and I decided to go to Rutgers, which, because of my dad's heart attacks and stuff, I had to work in the summertimes. He helped find jobs for me, but I knew that I would have to [make money]. I went through Air Force ROTC at Rutgers. There, you also get paid a stipend once you get by your second year, if you decide you're going to go on with ROTC and make a commitment.

Then, you're committed for four years in the Air Force. At that time, it was four. So, I decided to go that route, okay, that I was going to go in the military. I believed that--I still do believe that--even in this day and age, not so much the military, but kids coming out of high school should at least do some kind of service, as either part of their college career or, if they're not going to go into college, whatever.

I went in the service thinking maybe it was going to be a career, [laughter] but that was quickly abused by the career field I was put in, which was what they called--well, I was a radar controller, controlling aircraft with radar. I would be sent to places that weren't exactly ideal, let's just say. In fact, I thought I was heading for Vietnam. I graduated 1965, did a little work, and then, I went into the Air Force in '65, November of '65, was stationed in Sweetwater, Texas, in a little radar squadron there. It's another one that abused me of [making the military a career].

I was, at the time, supportive of the Vietnam War, because I was in the military. In fact, my wife and I got married in Winona. The two ministers that married us--we had dual ministers because she had a minister before, that had left that church and came back, and the minister there at the time. They both married us. The one wrote an anti-Vietnam piece, which my mother-in-law had sent me. I got kind of upset, but what it did was, I started researching, read Bernard Fall's book related to Indochina and all that kind of stuff, and started realizing, "Wait a minute, these guys are nationalists. This Domino thing and stuff…" Anyway, I've calmed down, and my, quote, "career" in the military proceeded.

[Editor's Note: Bernard B. Fall, an academic and war journalist, wrote several prominent, critical works on Western interventionism and imperialism in Southeast Asia, particularly *Street without Joy: Indochina at War, 1946-54* (1961) and *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (1966). In 1967, while covering a US Marine unit in battle, he stepped on a mine that killed him instantly.]

I thought I was going to go to Vietnam. I was in radar, manual radar, down in Texas, Sweetwater, and I didn't have to be cross-trained, like a lot of the guys that were in the more semi-automated systems had to be retrained to go over to Vietnam. So, I was prepared--my wife and I were prepared--for me to go over there. I was sent, instead [of] to Vietnam, which was kind of dangerous for radar controllers at the time, I went to Taiwan in support, in the extreme southern tip of the Island of Taiwan, also previously known as Formosa. It was a good tour. Even though I was unaccompanied, at our own expense, we brought my wife over. She lived about a hundred and some miles from me. I'd see her on breaks and stuff.

So, I was in support of Vietnam. I would monitor B-52s going from Guam to Vietnam and a variety of other duties. I was co-located with the Chinese Nationalist Air Force. Then, when I left there, after a year, I went to Panama City, Florida, as a trainer in radar for a year. By that time, I knew I was not going to make it a career, because I could've suddenly, after a period of time after that, been sent up to Alaska, I could've been sent to Turkey, wherever.

What was happening at the time was, when I was over in Taiwan, Martin Luther King was killed and Bobby Kennedy was killed. I remember hearing it on the radio, my shortwave, and wondered, what the hell was going on? So, I had a friend that was at another [detachment]. I

was a detachment commander there, with about four airmen for my comm support and three other officers under me. We rotated shifts and that kind of thing.

I started looking into--first of all, it was urban affairs--pursuing a career, postgraduate work, in that. Then, I was talking to this one fellow that was going for his master's in social work, a good friend of mine who was a detachment commander, was going to go back--he was from the Boston area--and go into social work. So, I started looking into master's of social work, community organization. I applied to several schools out here, East here. The only one I didn't get into was Columbia. I went for an interview for Columbia. They looked at me, they said, "Well, you're not black, and we couldn't place you as a community organizer," for my training.

So, I ran down to Rutgers, where I had already been accepted. So, I decided to go pursue my graduate degree there in the Rutgers Graduate School of Social Work, and that's what I did. It, at that time, was an accelerated sixteen-month program. I ended up with a master's in social work with a concentration in community organization.

SI: Going back to your mother, your parents got married down in Alabama, during the war. What do you know about her background?

DF: Well, I know a lot about her background. She came from a fairly large family. Cruts was her maiden name--and, again, because my brother and I are doing some research, have done research and stuff. They lived in Butler Park. Well, she grew up in Wilson Borough, right across the river from P-burg. My dad and her met at a roller rink, that I eventually went to, too, when she was in high school. I think he was out of high school at the time. So, her brothers and sisters, some of them went there, and so forth. My cousin and I ended up [going], the same people owned the place when we went there--but that's where they met.

Her family eventually moved to Butler Park, which is right outside of Washington, New Jersey. Musconetcong River runs right in front of my former grandfather's house, and that's basically where I spent a lot of my summer vacations. That's where I learned to swim in the creek and caught frogs and turtles, all that kind of stuff, and had a really nice [childhood]. My cousin lived out there, too. He was a year younger than me and we kind of grew up together, if you will. He eventually became a Marine and was a Marine sniper for two tours in Vietnam.

So, anyway, that's where her family lived when I was young and growing up. She has one sister left. She had several sisters and a couple of brothers. So, again, she became a housewife for a period of time, and she raised three kids. They raised three kids. I'm the eldest. My sister is three years younger than I am. She lives up in Glen Gardner. My brother lives down in West Virginia and he's nine years younger than I am. That's Kathy and Alan; go ahead.

SI: Your mother eventually went back into the workforce.

DF: Yes. She eventually started working for the AAA, when my dad had a heart attack and stuff, and, eventually, worked for them until she retired from there, rose up from secretarial all the way to office manager. That's when, again, my dad did part-time work for them, after he left his political career and stuff like that.

SI: Tell me a little bit about growing up in Phillipsburg. I think you said you were on Chambers Street.

DF: Yes, 105 Chambers Street. It's right where--I don't know whether you're familiar with P-burg …

SI: I go up there a few times a year for the train that they have there now. I am a little familiar with the area.

DF: Well, I mean, I could, basically, see part of the river from my house, from my porch, if you will. We grew up in a row house, which is still there, and my parents lived in it. My dad died in 2003; my brother and I were with him. My mom died in 2008. My nephew and his autistic son moved in with them for a period of time and she kind of took care of--he's now twenty-five--my nephew's son. So, I guess I'm losing my train of thought a little bit.

SI: You were telling me about Phillipsburg.

DF: Yes, anyway, yes, you were asking me about where I grew up, but it was a row house. Again, it's where Chambers Street hit Tyndall Avenue. It comes up and hits Chambers Street. It's a very steep hill, and I had a paper route down on what they called "The Flat," down on South Main Street. I don't know whether you've ever gone--you probably have gone--across the bridge there, the toll bridge, which, when I was growing up, was called "the new bridge," because "the old bridge" was toll-free.

I carried *The Easton Express*, in an area where that was a series of row houses, apartment buildings, and, at the time, an old hotel, where let's just say most of the people in it were either recovering alcoholics or alcoholics. Wardell Hotel, it was called. So, I had that paper route when I was in junior high and high school, in part of high school.

So, I grew up, quote, in a "river town," if you will. That's what it was. I'd walk across [the bridge]. When I was a kid, Hurricane Diane [August 1955] came through. I remember sitting at a house, with a bunch of other people, watching the flood go through. It eventually tore the old bridge in half. All these things were hitting it. I mean, cabins were coming down the river.

The river never got high enough to threaten it--it went over the surface of it--of the toll bridge, but never threatened to do any damage to it. They eventually put a Bailey bridge across, next to it, and then, eventually, re-built the old "free," quote, "free bridge," which was my major access to Easton, Pennsylvania.

In high school, I was a Hi-Y member. I was a YMCA member from the time I was a young kid. I'd walk across the river and go over to Easton. At the time, the YMCA was in downtown Easton. It's now on the outskirts of Easton somewhere. I can't remember where now, but that was me growing up.

In high school, I wasn't real athletic. I did intramural wrestling and played a little intramural basketball, but that was about it--but I busted my butt as far as academics went. I graduated eighth in my graduating class of 270-some kids, or 280, whatever it was.

SI: What were the schools that you went to?

DF: Well, I went to the Freeman School, which is no longer an elementary school, which was walking distance from my house. It was less than ten minutes' a walk from my house. At the time, it was K-8. Actually, they didn't have a kindergarten when I first started school. So, I went there from first grade to eighth grade, and then, P-burg High School, ninth through twelfth. That's where I graduated from, and the old P-burg High School is still there, but, now, I guess, I think it's a middle school now. They built a new high school. So, that was my [hometown], and, of course, my dad's hometown and all that kind of stuff, too.

SI: How would you describe the town, in terms of economics or groups present in the town?

DF: Well, it had a couple of major industries. It had Ingersoll-Rand. My grandfather worked there as a form fitter for years and years, my maternal grandfather. That's right along Route 22. Then, there was Baker Chemical down in The Flat. So, those were, I think, two of the [big industries], and then, there was--I can't remember the name of the industry. It was a pipe making/fitting industry down on The Flat, too, down off of South Main Street. I'm blanking out that name. So, there were two or three major industries like that.

The town was about eighteen thousand people. I think it's not much bigger than that now, and I'm just talking about the city or town of Phillipsburg. I'm not talking [about] these other, smaller towns [that] surrounded it, like Stewartsville and Alpha and those kind of places. All those towns sent their kids to P-burg High.

SI: What interested you the most in school?

DF: Well, I was in a high school technical course. I did real well, because I worked real hard, but history was my favorite subject. The technical course, of course, Algebra I, II and III and those kind of courses, my idea was to become an aeronautical engineer. Then, I took the boards, the SATs and stuff, and it was scored in the middle, and, also, found out that the technical thing wasn't for me, particularly after I found out I couldn't take pilot's training at the Academy. So, I went into, basically, was during college, was a history/poli. sci. major.

SI: You said you always had an interest in flying. Was there anything in particular that sparked that interest?

DF: I really don't know. Probably, my cousin and I built a lot of air models and stuff. It just intrigued me. Of course, my dad being a GI in World War II, I was born in '43, so, the World War II aircraft really intrigued me. Then, of course, our Air Force started the jets and all that kind of thing. So, I really can't say there was any flash moment when [I said], "Oh, yes, this is great." Aircraft, I just loved seeing them, I loved watching them fly and all that kind of stuff. So, I guess it just kind of grew, I guess.

SI: You said that, in addition to the paper route, you would also help out in your father's business.

DF: Yes, when I was in [school], yes, occasionally, I would do deliveries for him. When I was in college, during the summertime, I would do deliveries for him. I started college, graduated in 1961 from P-burg High, and went there [Rutgers] from '61 to '65, undergraduate. My dad still had his business at the time, and so, I would do some deliveries for him and stuff, for a summer or two. Then, he got me a job at what then was called Warren Paving. They did a lot of the [highways], like they did part of [Interstate] 78 and stuff like that. So, I worked for them, kind of grunt work and dirty work, if you will, "Give the college kid all the dirty stuff to do." [laughter]

My dad had had another heart attack. Well, let's see, he had his first major heart attack when I was in college. So, I definitely had to work in the summertime. In fact, in ROTC, normally, you'd go to summer camp after your junior year. Then, eventually, you get your commission upon graduation, but I had to work because of my dad's heart attack, to, again, put myself through school. So, I went to summer camp after I graduated from college and went up to Plattsburgh, New York, to do my training.

SI: Was college always your goal when you were in high school?

DF: Yes, yes, it was. I mean, actually, I was the first in my family to go to college, but I think it was kind of expected. My dad was kind of a hard ass, if you will. What I really wanted to do, if you want to know, beyond the flying, when that went away, I wanted to go into forestry, but I remember my dad saying, "I'm not sending you to any forestry school," blah, blah, blah.

I had been looking into it and going to apply for it, a school up in Upstate New York, and [become] a forest ranger or whatever. He said, "No, no, no," and you didn't argue with my father at the time. Plus, it would've been more expensive to go there. My mom and dad helped me out the first semester and, after that, I was basically on my own. I mean, they'd give me money, spending money, and stuff like that, occasionally, but I was basically on my own for working my way through school.

SI: Before we get into Rutgers, your father had this political career. Did you ever help out with any of the campaigns?

DF: Yes, I did. I would distribute flyers and stuff like that for him. I didn't do a whole lot, but I did do whatever he asked me to do, but he really didn't need [my help]. He had contacts. Again, the guy that he followed into this position as surrogate had been one of his good friends in high school and had encouraged him. He had been, for several years, a city commissioner. When he ran initially for it, I wasn't even [in] high school yet, so, I didn't have much to do with his campaign then.

SI: I am curious--the Kennedy campaign was obviously a significant event for your generation. Being in a somewhat political family and, at that time, being a Republican, how did your family view Kennedy?

DF: Well, that's an interesting question, because I never heard my dad badmouth Kennedy, okay. He was a Republican, a local Republican. I joked that I'm one of the few people I know that supported Goldwater in '64 and McGovern in '72, okay, yes, '64, whenever Goldwater was annihilated by Johnson and everything. At that time, it was my formative years, I didn't [vote]. Again, we became Democrats. [Editor's Note: Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater was the Republican nominee during the 1964 Presidential race. South Dakota Senator George McGovern ran as the Democratic candidate in the 1972 Presidential election.]

I became--I consider myself a progressive; almost, at times, when I was in grad school, a radical. I mean, I came out of the Air Force and helped organize a march across [New Brunswick] when Kent State happened. I was in grad school. I helped organize--I basically was the main organizer--for a march across New Brunswick from Douglass College to the Kirkpatrick Chapel at Rutgers. We had a kind of peace-in type of thing at the chapel, around Kent State, so that, kind of, I would consider myself way left of center.

[Editor's Note: On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen fired on students at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine others. Some of the students had been protesting the United States entry into Cambodia, while others had been passing nearby or observing the demonstration.]

At that time [in high school], I don't think I really knew what I was or what I would become. Again, I supported [Republicans] because my dad was a Republican, like a lot of kids did, until you go to college and start developing your own sense of what the political arena is like.

SI: You said that, while growing up in Phillipsburg, you spent your summers at your grandparents' home, which was relatively nearby.

DF: Yes.

SI: Had you had much opportunity to travel outside of the area before college?

DF: Not really. One of our big things to do on Sundays when I was growing up as a kid is, [with] my dad, you'd go for a Sunday drive. We'd drive all over Jersey and stuff like that, but did I travel, not in high school. I can't recall any real trip.

I mean, I'd visited New Brunswick, I'd visited Rutgers. I applied to three other schools. I was accepted at Lake Forest College on Lake Michigan in Illinois and I was accepted at Denison College in Ohio, but they were private schools. It would've been real expensive to go to. I would've had some kind of scholarship, but it wouldn't have been enough to cover, nearly enough to cover, tuition and books and all that kind of stuff, so that I kind of gave that up.

Rutgers was a state college. I got a State Scholarship and all that kind of stuff. So, that's why, another reason, I went to Rutgers.

SI: Tell me about coming down to New Brunswick and getting settled in, what those first weeks and months were like.

DF: Well, back then, you wore beanies and you were treated like a piece of dog meat, if you will, as a freshman. It was a big change, because, obviously, you're now away from [your] parents, but, at that time, college really was *in loco parentis*. I mean, they acted as your parent and they told you what to do.

I'll give you an example, that I took Spanish for two years in school, wanted to take Spanish when I went to college, but I hadn't had it for almost two years. They herded us into this big auditorium down at Rutgers. The guy got up on the stage and he didn't speak a word of English. There was a thick thing, like this, in front of you, a test. You had to take a test and it was all in Spanish, a placement test. If you failed that test, you could not take Spanish. You had to take another language. Language was a two-year requirement at the time. So, I had to take French, which I hated. I mean, it served me well, but I just hated French. I really struggled with it for a period of time. So, *in loco parentis*, I mean, they [controlled you]. Now, it's different.

I would've loved to take Spanish. It turned out that I've traveled to Honduras and done mission work down there and taught myself a smattering of Spanish to get by. I would've loved to have continued that and had some kind of basis for it by the time I graduated from college, but that wasn't in the cards. [laughter]

SI: Where did you live at first?

DF: Well, I lived in a dorm, in what they called a "temporary" dorm. They're still up, up at the Heights [now the Busch Campus]. It was a one-story thing. I remember, my dad dropped me off the first time, with these open-bay, bunk-bed type things, and taking the bus down [to] the main campus. It was right across from Camp Kilmer, the old Camp Kilmer, and parts of it--in fact, I went by it the other day--still exist. That dorm still exists. I don't know what they use it for.

SI: Was this an old barracks from Camp Kilmer?

DF: No, no. It was new. It was a new facility. So, anyway, I was there for the first year, and then, I joined a fraternity and, for a semester, lived in the fraternity. Again, I even worked in the fraternity, so [that] I could afford living in the fraternity. Then, because of my grade point [average] and stuff like that, and I applied for it, I became a preceptor, and my room and board were paid for, at one of the new dorms they had just built, Tinsley Hall.

SI: Okay.

DF: You know where I'm talking about?

SI: Yes, right on the Bishop House Quad.

DF: Yes, Bishop House, exactly, and my fraternity was only a hop, skip and a jump away. I was in Alpha Sig. So, I'd eat some meals there, some meals at the main cafeteria or whatever you

want to call it. Then, in my senior year, I became the head of the Quad. You know the old Quad?

SI: Yes.

DF: You know what I'm talking about?

SI: Yes, in back of Bishop House, with Pell and Hegeman.

DF: Yes, I ran that, or I was head preceptor for that. I lived there, okay, and that paid my way. Again, my room and board were taken care of and all that kind of stuff. So, I was that for my senior year in college. I was the head preceptor in the Quad, which really helped a great deal. I was a Henry Rutgers Scholar, so, I was doing graduate work, even as a senior in college, and wrote a thesis.

SI: Sticking with the preceptor experience, you mentioned that *in loco parentis* was the rule of the day. Looking at slightly earlier periods, I know that the preceptors were one arm of that. Was that still true when you were there? For example, were you enforcing that?

DF: Oh, yes, you'd loosely enforce the rules. There were rules and stuff like that--no women in the dorm and no alcohol, that kind of stuff. That was one of your roles. Like, the big thing with the Quad, when we had Homecoming, I helped locate a car, and then, helped these guys build a float for it, okay; in that there lies an issue.

I had broken up with a girl from Douglass, after two years, in my senior year in college and was kind of, quote, "playing the field," and met my present wife. We've been married fifty-one years now. We saw, in the fraternity, there was an announcement about a mixer at Columbia School of Nursing, Columbia University School of Nursing, up in Harkness Hall, fast by the George Washington Bridge. So, we were standing there and two of my fraternity brothers said, "Hey, you've got a car. Why don't we go to that? Nurses are fast." [laughter] So, we went.

I told this--my wife's eyes roll when I tell this story anymore, because she's heard it so many times. I was pigeonholed by this one girl that I was trying to get away from. She [his wife] was one of the hostesses serving punch, because she's an upperclassman. So, I stood up and asked her to dance. We danced some dances and stuff.

My fraternity brothers came over and said, "Hey, we're going to ask our," quote, "dates," the people we'd just met, "to go down the road here, down the street, for a drink. Are you going to ask yours?" "Oh, okay." So, I asked her and she said, "Sure." So, we went down. Then, they leaned over and said, "Hey, we're going to ask our dates to Homecoming," and I said, "Okay." [laughter] So, I turned to Ruthie and I said, "Would you like to go to Homecoming?" and she said--fortunately--she said, "Yes."

So, that day, then, I tell you that because I was building a float until, like, four in the morning with these kids, with the freshmen. My roommate shakes me about eight in the morning--I fell in bed about four in the morning--and says, "Aren't you supposed to meet somebody?"

I was supposed to meet--the three girls were coming in by bus from New York City. So, I ran down. At the time, there was a little restaurant called the Mayflower, on the corner right up the street from the train station. There they were, sitting in the restaurant. So, that was Ruthie's introduction to me on campus.

So, anyhow, we started dating and, eventually, got engaged and got married. We got married in 1966. I went in the service, and then, we got married in July, July 30th. I could look on my ring--it's the 30th.

SI: Going back to your freshman year, you said you eventually got into history and poli. sci. Did that start in your freshman year?

DF: Yes, basically. Well, I mean, there was the two avenues possible--the military, Air Force--but it became pretty evident that history was my strength, history, and poli. sci. was kind of a minor. It related, but history was the basic thing. I did my thesis on the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, which is kind of funny, because they just had--we've been watching *The Crown*, I don't know [if you watch it] on Netflix.

SI: I have seen a little bit of it, yes.

DF: Yes, and so, we've been watching it here. They just had the episode where the English went in to seize the Suez. It allowed the Russians, by the way, gave them carte blanche to go and invade Hungary, because there was a Hungarian Rebellion at the time against the Communist government. So, anyway, be that as it may, particularly, American foreign affairs was my specialty. I had one of the top professors in that. His name was Gardner.

[Editor's Note: Beginning on October 29, 1956, Israel, aided by Great Britain and France, invaded Egypt with the goal of eliminating Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and returning the Suez Canal to Western control. The Americans, Soviets and the United Nations pressured the invading forces to abandon their campaign in early November 1956. Beginning on October 23, 1956, Hungarians revolted against the Communist government installed by the Soviet Union after World War II. Following an invasion and brutal occupation by Soviet forces, most resistance ceased by November 10th. Approximately 200,000 Hungarians fled the country after the Hungarian Revolution and many settled in the United States.]

SI: Lloyd Gardner, yes.

DF: Yes. He was my thesis coordinator. In fact, I sent him a note, because he had retired a few years ago and they gave him an honor and a chair or whatever. So, I sent him an email and we talked a little bit. It was kind of funny. It was kind of neat.

SI: He would have just joined the faculty while you were a student, correct? [Editor's Note: Dr. Lloyd C. Gardner, a diplomatic historian, now a Professor of History *Emeritus*, came to Rutgers in 1963.]

DF: Yes, yes. I don't know, he had some kind of condition where he was completely bald and stuff. I don't know whether you knew that about him or not.

SI: Yes, I have seen him.

DF: Yes. So, anyway, he was a good professor.

SI: What about other professors that stand out in your memory?

DF: Well, not too many. I mean, I remember Susman, who would give a big lecture on World War II and stuff like that, and everybody would flock to that, on the concentration camps and all that kind of thing. [Editor's Note: Dr. Warren I. Susman, a cultural historian, taught at Rutgers from 1960 until his death in 1985. He served as chair of the Rutgers College History Department from 1973 to 1979.] There was another professor who had a German background who would give that lecture. Oh, I took Greek history, and I'm trying to remember his name right now.

SI: Charanis.

DF: Yes, I took him, yes. So, I mean, he was famous, and he was funny. I was going to take the slavery course with the one guy that got in trouble for …

SI: Genovese.

DF: Genovese, for the antiwar stuff. In that time, I was still right-of-center, but I didn't take it because I got my thesis. So, I decided it would've been too much of a load in my senior year to do that, too.

[Editor's Note: On April 23, 1965, at a teach-in at Rutgers University's Scott Hall, professor of history Eugene D. Genovese declared, "…I do not fear or regret the impending Viet Cong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it." A firestorm of controversy ensued and became a focal point in the 1965 New Jersey gubernatorial race, but Rutgers University President Mason W. Gross, with the support of the faculty, resisted public pressure to dismiss Genovese, on the principle of academic freedom.]

SI: The teach-in that brought him to, at least statewide prominence, if not national, was during your senior year. Did you go there? Did you know about it?

DF: Oh, yes, I knew about it. A lot of my fraternity brothers were pissed off about it and all that kind of stuff. Again, at the time, I was still, quote, a "Republican," not a Democrat, but I was open-minded enough to just listen to both sides. I didn't demonstrate against them.

I remember, one of my--well, actually, he turned out to be my best man, he went in the Army--they were picketing across the street from our fraternity house one day, coming up the street. He ran out on the porch and started shouting at them and stuff like that, cursing at them, calling them traitors and all this kind of stuff. [laughter] I wasn't at that point.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Ready?

DF: Yes.

SI: We were talking about your days at Rutgers. We had been talking about how there were mixed feelings about the antiwar movement at that time. Did the war come up often in your classes, particularly being a history/poli. sci. major?

DF: Yes, it came up, and I'm trying to [think]--I don't know any vivid memory of any kind of real argument or anything like that that came up. Obviously, Gardner, he was involved in the antiwar movement. They did some teach-ins and things like that. The first course I think I took from him was "American Foreign Affairs." It only went up to a certain period of time, but it was obvious that he was antiwar. There were some demonstrations on campus, nothing large, like in New York City, on Columbia or anything like that. Again, you've got to remember, I was in Air Force ROTC. [laughter]

By the way--I took some notes related to it--I mentioned the Kent State thing, but that happened in 1969 [1970]. I had a fellow I went to high school with, who was also a Rutgers grad, his name was Bruce Lawrence. I remember being in Spanish class with him in our sophomore [year]; he was a year ahead of me in high school, was also a really good athlete, football player. Because of studies and stuff, I remember he had on his books, "Air Force, US Air Force, US Air Force." In any event, he and I ended up at Rutgers and he was in ROTC, too.

I remember the last time I saw him, at the old Quonset hut, which I don't think exists anymore over there, near the end of our senior year. I think he was Wing Commander at the time. I was a horrible marcher and he helped me out there. [laughter] He became a pilot, an F-4C pilot, and then, was shot down over Vietnam in the '60s. They never recovered his body. His brother--and, again, he's from P-Burg--his brother, Dick Lawrence, went over to Vietnam after the war, many years after the war, and tried to investigate it, locate it.

Well, a few years ago, they found his wreckage and his body, his remains, and they brought it back to the States. There was a memorial online to him and I purchased that in perpetuity. It had a picture of him. He was buried--I wasn't able to come to his [service]. They brought him back, his remains, and they buried him in P-Burg. Eventually, my goal is to find out where his grave is and to go honor him there, because he was a friend and, obviously, I was a Vietnam era veteran, in support of the war.

[Editor's Note: North Vietnamese forces shot down the F4C Phantom piloted by First Lieutenant Bruce Lawrence on July 5, 1968.]

My cousin, who I grew up with, was a Marine sniper. So, that's always been poignant. That's always been a reminder of what that war was, a terrible waste, basically. We were fighting for the wrong reasons in the wrong place, as far as I'm concerned, as a history major. They did a

really good piece--what's his name did it, the historian--just did a piece, I don't know whether you [saw it], a series of Vietnam?

SI: Ken Burns?

DF: Ken Burns, and I haven't seen the whole thing yet. I've seen parts of it, and Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist, okay. He was also a Communist, but he tried to cooperate with the US initially and he was rebuffed. So, anyway, I have certainly a diametrically-opposed position from what it was when I was a senior in college and in the Air Force ROTC than I do now, or did right after I left the service, even during the time I was in the service. As I say, I had done some research and stuff like that.

So, it has impact; it has impact on me still, today. Again, one of the things I want to do and have not been able to do, even though I come out here periodically, is go up there, just drive up there, and find out where Bruce is buried, because, for years and years and years, he was lost, if you will. So, that kind of summarizes, for me, in a nutshell, what that war was all about. A lot of people know people that either were lost or went through [traumatic events]. My cousin, he's fully disabled because of PTSD and the things that he saw and went through during his two-year term, two years over there.

Then, you reflect back on what it was like when you're in college and just starting, how we got involved and why we got involved and that kind of thing. So, I don't know whether that explains…

SI: That is one of the things that we try to capture, how complex the war was and how views changed over time. Tell me a little bit more about the Air Force ROTC training itself. When you started in 1961, was it still mandatory, the first two years?

DF: I think so, yes. I'm not positive of that. I think so, but not positive. Yes, after the two years, you had to choose whether you're going to continue or not. I obviously did that, because I wanted to be in the Air Force. It also helped pay [my way], gave me a stipend to put myself through school, too. I had a combination of things, financially, to make that work.

Yes, it was either Army or Air Force, and the Air Force, obviously, was the one I chose. I think they had Navy, too, and I don't remember whether there was anything [else], any others, but it made sense for me to go in the Air Force, obviously. I had a lot of friends that were in the Army, Air Force, fraternity brothers and that kind of thing.

I mean, the first two years was kind of ["Mickey Mouse"]. I was a Henry Rutgers Scholar, okay. My grade point was really, really high, I mean. I got "Cs" and "Bs" in this stupid course, because it was multiple-choice and, as far as I'm concerned, the courses themselves were a joke, if you know what I'm saying. Often, they didn't make sense, and I guess maybe that, in the back of my mind, may have been a little bit of rebellion on my part.

I don't know, but, I mean, I got almost straight "As" in everything else, I was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate, but ROTC, again, "Bs" and "Cs." That was the only [problem], probably because I just couldn't be bothered at the period of time, because it just didn't make any sense.

SI: Was it primarily classroom work, or was there any hands-on or fieldwork?

DF: Well, the other thing, you did drills, even the Air Force, and therein lies an issue. I was also editor of what they called *The Contrails*, which was a newsletter for Air Force ROTC, for a year. That got me out of drilling for a year, but, then, I had to drill and I had to take a squadron. We were up in Buccleuch Park or wherever it was. I got entangled in the trees and everything. [laughter] In fact, I think it was Bruce that came and rescued me.

I just was not--that was not my thing. Although when I went to summer camp, we had a guy that had some British background. He taught us all kinds [of steps] and we had all kinds of cool things. When we did the drills and stuff, we were really cool. I even got involved in that a little bit, but the marching and all that, I just couldn't [get into it].

I was Air Force ROTC, "What am I doing this for? I'm never going to use this. I'm never going to command, march a squadron of people," but it was basically teaching discipline and all that kind of stuff, the things that you do. I was, at that time, horrible at it. [laughter]

SI: You said that you did not have to go to summer camp until after graduation.

DF: Yes.

SI: Because you had to work when your father could not.

DF: Right.

SI: Was that the only summertime commitment? Were there others?

DF: No. That was the only summertime commitment with [Air Force ROTC]. You went between your junior year and your senior year. You went for a month; I think it was a month or five weeks. I can't remember anymore. You did drills and you got all that kind of [training]. You got indoctrinated, if you will.

Then, at the end of that thing, you usually got your bars pinned on. In my case, it was the senior year and my wife, at the time, my fiancée, flew up with my parents. She pinned my bars on me, my second lieutenant bars on me, at the graduation ceremonies there at the Air Force base in Plattsburgh, New York.

There was some classroom work. There was marching and there was that kind of thing, indoctrination, what you're going to encounter when you go in the service, what career field you're going to choose, that kind of thing. I didn't get any of my choices. [laughter] I wanted to go into either Special Forces or intelligence. You know what Special Forces are? No, Special Forces not meaning what you think of [as] Special Forces-- Special Services.

SI: Yes.

DF: Where you don't wear a uniform and it's kind of like the FBI of the Armed Services. I didn't get that and I didn't get intelligence. I put in for the Northeast someplace; I got West Texas. [laughter] That's sort of clueing me in on the military real fast.

SI: Before we get deeper into your Air Force experience, you had been part of a fraternity at Rutgers. Why did you choose Alpha Sigma?

DF: Alpha Sigma Phi? I don't know. They rushed us in when we were up at the Heights. We got these invitations. I went to several fraternities and they seemed to be the friendliest. They obviously offered me brotherhood, eventually. I mean, you had to go through your pledge class and all that garbage, but I had fun. I was in a very small pledge class.

I'm still really close friends with--in fact, I saw him a couple days ago--Mike Maguire, his name is. He graduated a chem major from Rutgers, and then, eventually, went back and got his MBA. He wasn't in the military, but he and I are really close friends. We went to Homecoming this past October.

We email each other and text each other and all that kind of stuff. Well, I shouldn't say text; he doesn't have a modern phone, a smart phone, [laughter] and he's proud of that. He's been inviting me to things. He's been operating in this system where you're mentoring chem majors and that kind of thing, because he's looking for stuff to do. He's retired now and he lives up in Pittstown. So, I think our pledge class is only twelve or fifteen guys. So, we got fairly close.

The fraternity was a lot of fun, the parties were a lot of fun. In fact, Mike brought, when I had lunch with my sister and him up in Clinton--my sister lives in, as I said, Glen Gardner--he brought a bunch of, somebody sent him, gave him a bunch of these pictures, the party pictures, where you're out in front of your fraternity house, at one of the big weekends type things. So, that was kind of fun, seeing that again, because I didn't keep any of that stuff.

Fraternities were fun, and I'm glad I lived one semester in the fraternity before I became a preceptor and I actually had to work. I was a, quote, "maid." I cleaned the bathrooms and stuff, as I said, to help pay my way in the fraternity. I played intramural football, flag football, for the fraternity for three years. I wrestled for them.

So, again, it was an education. It was a social education. I met a gal that I was pinned to for two years. I still often wonder what the heck happened to her. Hopefully, she's happy. We broke up when I was a senior at Rutgers.

SI: Was there still a lot of formality in the fraternity? Did you have a housemother?

DF: Yes, we had a house mom and there were "dos" and "don'ts" and all that kind of stuff. I ate, we ate, at the house, that kind of thing. As I said, that was a little different after I became a

preceptor and stuff, although I still would take a couple or three meals at the fraternity, even when I was a preceptor, a week.

You learned a lot. You had fun, when you're a pledge class, raiding the house and all that kind of stuff, doing all that kind of stuff, memorizing names and all that kind of thing, but do I support my fraternity, no. [laughter] I'm really not [involved now]. I mean, I grew out of that real fast, even while I was still in school.

Again, I feel fortunate that I knew [them]. Mike and I are close and we've known each other for a long time. I mean, he and I went through the names, a couple of them have died since, and had gone on to professional careers and stuff like that. We've figured out who all was in our pledge class, but we're not in touch with any of them, if you will. We're still wondering whether a couple of them are still alive or not.

SI: Regarding the Henry Rutgers Thesis, how did you settle on your topic? How did you do the research?

DF: Well, I did a lot of reading. I mean, I did a whole semester of research. I missed a couple of things, though. I didn't concentrate on the oil thing as I should have. I did more of the political thing, Nasser and the nationalistic fervor around him. I'm proud of that, but I was kind of torn apart by the people that reviewed it in the History Department about not saying more about oil and why Britain and France went into the Suez, because that was primarily the reason, their lines of oil, but, also, the Prime Minister hated Nasser.

They didn't understand the whole nationalist thing that was fomenting then. At the time, it wasn't the big religious thing it is now in the Muslim world, but I don't know. To be perfectly [honest], it wasn't chosen for me, I just think it was in the news at one time. I don't know how I stumbled across it, to tell you the truth. I don't know whether Gardner recommended it. That's lost to me right now. [laughter] It was very interesting. I enjoyed doing it. I enjoyed the research and stuff like that, but why I specifically chose that, I don't know.

I really couldn't give you [a good answer]. Probably because of how complicated it was and the fact that it allowed, again, the Russians to cement the Iron Curtain, to put down the Hungarian Rebellion, Uprising. I mean, the British got roasted for that, for going into Egypt. Then, the Russians were able to move into Hungary and put the popular uprising down and not pay the price, because Britain and France, they're going before the UN and all the rest of this stuff and being embarrassed by the whole thing. So, I think that was a part of it, the different aspects of that whole thing.

SI: I believe you mentioned that you worked between graduation and going on active duty.

DF: Yes, what I did was, I graduated and I got my orders. My orders were--I was going to go in in November, early November, at Sweetwater, Texas. I got my [orders]. So, I had those few months. I took one month to go out to visit my wife's hometown in Winona and meet her mom and her aunt who lived with her mom at the time. That was really good, that I was able to go out, because I had never been there. So, I stayed there for a month. Then, when I came back, I

got a job at a grocery store, a small grocery store in P-Burg, stocking shelves and stuff like that. It was [to] earn a few bucks before I went in, keep busy until I went in.

Ruthie was, my wife, still in nursing school. I had her car, because it was expensive to keep a car in the middle of New York City. So, I'd run back and forth all the time, that kind of thing. So, it worked out really well. What I did was, I just lived at home. I lived in my dad and mom's house, in my old bedroom with my brother, [laughter] which I had been doing up until the time I went to college anyway. So, it was a nice interlude, I guess you could say. No, there was no pressure and stuff.

Then, November, the first week of November, I went in the service. I remember flying down to Texas, Sweetwater, Texas, flew into Dallas-Fort Worth, and then, flew a DC-3 to Abilene, and then, took a car over to Sweetwater. It was about forty miles west of Abilene, and lived with another lieutenant, who was a real trip. That was November 1965, and then, my wife and I got married, again, in the end of July '66.

SI: What was a typical day like at Sweetwater?

DF: Well, first, I went to training in Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida. My wife and her mother came down and visited me at Christmastime while I was down there, was down there for several weeks, becoming a controller, okay, to learn the manual control system and how to control aircraft and all that.

Then, I went back to Sweetwater. Our squadron was a squadron of F-104s out of Big Springs, Texas, and we would control them--the worst aircraft in the inventory. You don't know anything about the 104, do you?

SI: Tell me about it.

DF: The 104 Starfighter was, at that time, the fastest aircraft in the inventory--basically, a rocket with stubby wings--and a very dangerous aircraft. It killed more [pilots]--it killed the first black astronaut. To give you an idea, when they first developed the aircraft, they developed it to be really fast. It was, again, the fastest, Mach-2-plus.

They had the ejection thing going out the bottom of the aircraft, okay--big mistake, killed a couple of people because of it. They corrected that problem. Its armaments were infrared Sidewinder missiles and a Gatling gun, very [powerful]. A couple of them shot themselves down because of how fast it was. So, they had to correct that problem. The Germans got them. Eventually, we gave them to the Germans. The Germans called it "The Widow Maker."

I was on a scope. We would do high-altitude control aircraft. Aircraft would come out of Big Springs, our interceptors, and then, we would have a, quote, "target." You'd have to intercept that target, get in on the target, lock-in with the radar, okay, so that they could mock, pretend they're going to release their weapons. Well, the 104 had one of the worst radars. It only had a fifteen-degree swing. It was in the nose. You had to drive that sucker right up the butt of that [intruder] to get a lock on, real close, okay. So, that was one issue.

Another issue is, one time, I was on scope and one of the guys was controlling another aircraft. We're doing high altitudes. We were shooting them up to forty thousand feet as fast as we could go, to intercept, but, by that time, they were almost out of fuel. So, you had to turn them around and bring them back. [laughter] Well, in this case, the aircraft started coming apart and the pilot punched out. He came back and he hit the rear stabilizer. He ended up being in the hospital for, like, nine months. He was fortunate. The aircraft just disintegrated.

That's the kind of aircraft the 104 was. Why they even built the sucker, other than speed, I have no idea. What we would do over in Taiwan is, we'd point our aircraft and fly them at what was then Communist China, still is, to see how they would react and to get, also, a reading on what their radar was like, but we didn't use 104s over there. We used Phantoms and those kinds of aircraft, 100s [North American F-100 Super Sabre].

SI: Were the pilots that were flying from--was it Big Springs?

DF: Big Springs.

SI: Were they in training themselves, or was it just a regular unit?

DF: Yes, they were trained. I mean, they were trained elsewhere to fly this aircraft and trained there also. There was a squadron of those there and that was our [squadron]. Big Springs was only eighty miles southwest of Sweetwater. So, that's another reason why that was our squadron.

Pilots and radar controllers often didn't get to see eye-to-eye. Pilots, particularly fighter pilots, didn't think their stuff stank, if you will. They thought they were God's gift to humanity--not all of them, some of them. Like, we had one [situation], once again, I was on another console and one of the lieutenants was on it. We were doing low-level intercepts, where we had controlled airspace. One of the aircraft would act as a target and the other would [act] as the interceptor. Then, they'd change off and that kind of thing.

Well, this one, when he was controlling, this one guy, this one pilot, would resist taking directions from him. They were flying co-altitude, meaning they were at the same altitude. He [the radar controller] gave a direction to separate them. This guy [the pilot] decided he was going to [ignore him] and he turned into the target. Now, you know what could happen.

SI: Yes.

DF: Okay, and he finally separated him. I remember, my lieutenant slammed the thing down. He said, "Send him back to base. I'm not controlling these guys anymore." Of course, they gave him grief, but he was in the right. He was operating, he was keeping them safe. These guys thought they could do anything they wanted--some of them, again, some of them, not all of them, a lot of them. I guess you could say a minority, but, usually, they made the most noise.

So, anyway, that is kind of the history of the 104. If you put tip tanks on it to give it more range, then, it slowed the thing down dramatically. You put tip tanks on it. They were stubby, little wings. They were about as long as from here to there.

SI: Perhaps six feet?

DF: Yes, they were stubby, little wings, but it was for a reason. Again, we joked, I mean, basically, they were strapping a pilot to a damn rocket, with poor radar. If he blasted up to a high-altitude in Mach-2, he was going to burn his fuel, "Boom." He's going to have to turn around and go home, whereas a F-4 Phantom, I mean, all you had to do was point them at the target. He'd get a lock on and they'd take over. Once they have a lock on, they take over the intercept, okay. They're responsible.

Again, you get an F-4 or whatever, when I was in the service, it was one of the newest aircraft in the inventory. It had great radar, it had great range, it was fast. That was what Bruce Lawrence was shot down in. A SAM missile hit him. So, those were a joy to control. [laughter] I mean, there are all kinds of stories I could tell you about that, but Navy pilots were a trip, too, particularly ones coming off carriers.

SI: Was that while you were in Taiwan that you would be dealing with those?

DF: Well, yes, you deal with Navy. If you get around an aircraft carrier, suddenly, you might see a swarm of aircraft that just came off the carrier. You had to get around those guys and that kind of stuff. Landing on a carrier is a whole different game, man. It's dangerous, and guys would have to slam their [aircraft]. Basically, you're slamming that aircraft on that deck, on a rolling deck. You're hooked by a wire to stop you from going off the deck.

A lot of those guys, when they're flying regularly and landing on an airfield, would forget that they're not landing on a carrier. They'd blow tires and all kinds of stuff. They'd come in hot, if you will. So, anyway, that's a little bit of extraneous stuff.

SI: You were at Sweetwater for about one year.

DF: I was at Sweetwater from November of '65 to '68.

SI: You were there for quite a while.

DF: Yes, I was there for a while. Then, I went to Taiwan from--wait a minute, is it '67 or '68? No, it was to '67, and then, '67-'68, I was in Taiwan. Then, when I got out, I went to Tyndall as a trainer and separated in '69.

SI: Was your wife able to come down to Sweetwater with you?

DF: Oh, yes. That was an accompanied tour. Well, yes, that was an accompanied tour, except there was a shortage of base housing. Base housing was just a few [units]. There was only two hundred-and-some people in the whole squadron. So, when I got down there, as a second

lieutenant, there wasn't any base housing available for me. Then, when I got married, after I was in, we rented an apartment in town until we left for Taiwan.

SI: Living in the South at that time, was there any kind of cultural shock?

DF: Oh, yes. As an example, well, first of all, the first time I got there, it was a dry county. The TV was on--I was with this one lieutenant, staying with this one lieutenant before I got my own place--and this minister was on from this little town called Buffalo Gap, right outside of Abilene, which was forty miles [away]. It was our support base. There was a SAC [base]--at that time, it was called SAC, Strategic Air Command--had B-52s there. That was our support base, for going to PX [post exchange] and all that kind of stuff.

These guys were yelling about [how] there was a wet/dry vote for that little town. This town didn't even have sidewalks. What happened is, a restaurant and a package store went in. They voted to go wet, by one vote. This minister was threatening to excommunicate if he found out who'd voted for this thing. It was like, "What is going on?" [laughter] So, again, we had a small officers' club. So, we had access to booze and all that kind of stuff, but that was a culture shock.

The other thing was, we had a black lieutenant come down to the base. I found out that he had to stay in, quote, "the other side of the tracks" in Sweetwater--Sweetwater was a little burg--in, basically, the poor, really run-down section of town, like a place about the size of half of this room. I went to the Commander. I said, "What is going on?" He was married, but couldn't bring his wife down at the time.

Unfortunately, our commander, a colonel, was from Alabama originally. So, I think that had something to do with it, too. So, what they proceeded to do was ship him to the airbase up in the larger city--I'm blanking out the city in Texas now. It's where Texas Tech is. Anyway, they shipped him to the airbase there, because it was on base.

SI: Was that out by San Antonio?

DF: No, San Antonio is south.

SI: Yes.

DF: That's where Kelly is. I did TDY [temporary duty] training there with F-102s.

[Editor's Note: Texas Tech University is located in Lubbock, Texas. The US Air Force flew the Convair F-102 Delta Dagger interceptor fighter from the early 1950s into the Vietnam War.]

SI: We can put it in later.

DF: Yes, it doesn't matter. We'll put it in later. Anyhow, they shipped him there because it was on-base housing. He was about to get married.

That was another thing that turned me off to the Air Force, to the military, at that time. This was '65, '66, so, there was a lot of [activity], with the whole Civil Rights Movement was just starting and Vietnam was starting to blow up, but I couldn't understand that. It really, really stuck in my craw, if you will, that they couldn't find a place.

He couldn't rent a place in town. In fact, we put him up, this other lieutenant and I, put him up in our apartment--and the landlady raised hell--temporarily. What are you going to do? I did what I could. Again, I went in to see the Commander and everything, and it fell on deaf ears.

So, over in Taiwan, we didn't face that issue. You didn't face that issue in Vietnam, man. I mean, it wasn't black/white in Vietnam or on those kinds of bases, the military, but there was still segregation and stuff, the end of segregation and stuff, over here and in some of the bases. So, even though, in '47, we had integrated the military, there was still a residue of that.

[Editor's Note: In July 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981, ending segregation in the Armed Forces.]

SI: Did you have other duties on base, or were you just focused on the radar?

DF: Well, yes. In a small air squadron, you did multiple things. I was the main air security officer. The neat thing about that is, I got my own flight jacket. [laughter] I was also the disaster and preparedness officer, in case we had a nuclear attack. I had a couple other things, too. I don't remember what they were anymore, but I had three or four other special duties, if you will. In fact, as the air security thing, I was in charge of the security police on the squadron and stuff like that, which were, basically, our enlisted guys.

SI: Tell me about deploying to Taiwan, what that process was like.

DF: Well, again, I was expecting, I was trying to finesse--believe me, I didn't want to go to Vietnam, but I was willing to. I was not going to not go, okay. I was trying to finagle to get, even though it would've meant re-upping for a couple years, to Germany, but, then, I kind of settled on the fact that I was going to Vietnam.

My wife and I had bought a collie, a purebred collie, out in Abilene, to keep her company while I was gone, but, then, I got my orders. The guy right before me and the guy right after me went to 'Nam; I went to Taiwan, luck of the draw, because Taiwan was in support of Vietnam. Again, I told you a little bit about that in the beginning, it was a great tour. It was the best year I spent in the Air Force.

I was stationed in the extreme southern tip of the island, O Laun Pi. We were in Quonset huts--you know the old Quonset huts?--run by the Navy, US Navy, as R&R facilities for their people. We rented rooms from them. We rented an office space, and then, we rented three rooms for our officers and enlisted people. We could see the Sea of Japan from our Quonset hut.

A few miles away, we had a beach where Taiwanese fishermen would come in. It was like living in Bermuda. That's what the water was like, clear. One of the guys was a scuba diver.

We did snorkeling and stuff like that. Ruthie would come down for a few days. So, I mean, it was a good tour. I went through a typhoon there and through a variety of other things.

I made friends with a number of the Nationalist Chinese officers and stuff like that, and airmen. We had these Quonsets, and then, they had their own facility, their own area. They had a basketball court. I'd go up and play basketball with the guys all the time. I'd go jogging through the little village at the bottom of the hill where we were. These little kids, little Taiwanese kids, would form a chain, a human chain, across the road and [Mr. Fell speaks Chinese]. That means, in Chinese, "American," and I'd have to jump over them. They'd just laugh. [laughter]

So, again, I lucked out on the tour, like I can't tell you how lucked out. My wife was not supposed to be there, but this one lieutenant before me had brought his wife over and had kind of broken the precedent. He told me that, so, we were able to do it. We rented the place in Tainan, which was our support base there. Tainan was where--you know what Air America is?

SI: Yes.

DF: Okay, Air America had a base there, CIA, blah, blah, blah. My wife is a nurse, but she couldn't work. She couldn't work as a full-time nurse, because she wasn't in the service and her license didn't allow that. So, she did the shot clinic and stuff, volunteer shot clinic, and did stuff like that on the base.

We had a PX there and we rented this little place. We had a woman that came in to help my wife cook and clean, that kind of thing, keep her company. We had a little compound and, right next [to us] in our compound, there was some Air Force officers. They were on picket. That's the only thing that I wish I had done that I didn't do, which was volunteer. What they fly is the DC-7--well, they were the military version of the DC-7--with a big radar on top.

SI: Okay, AWACS?

[Editor's Note: The Lockheed EC-121 Warning Star, the military version of the Lockheed L-1049 Super Constellation, was used for airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) operations during the Vietnam War. The Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), mounted on the Boeing E-3 Sentry, developed later.]

DF: Okay, AWACS, thank you. I knew all that stuff before, [laughter] the AWACS. They would fly up and down the Vietnamese coast and control aircraft in, like my friend Bruce. They'd send and control the guys into over North Vietnam and South Vietnam on missions. They'd get combat pay and air pay.

It's something I wish I had done. AWACS is still around. I was in one of the modern ones. We were down, a few years ago, in Tucson and went out to the airbase there. I toured the thing. It was really *the* aircraft. That would've been cool, that would've been neat.

Anyway, in that compound was four officers. They'd come over and apologize to my wife because they'd bring girls in and stuff. [laughter] She'd hear this "clack-clack clack," high heels.

One day, the Colonel came over and apologized and all that kind of [thing]. Anyway, it was a good tour. We learned a lot. I learned, I tried to learn, as much Chinese as I could.

SI: Were you working directly with the Chinese, or were you just in proximity to them?

DF: Well, I was in proximity, but we did some co-stuff. I was on the same dais--you know where the radars were? We had a big tracking board and stuff like that, but they didn't share [all the information]. Like, I'll give you an example--you know what the [Lockheed] SR-71 [supersonic reconnaissance plane] is?

SI: Yes.

DF: The Blackbird, okay. Well, we were responsible--well, anybody was responsible, it flew out of Guam--and it would overfly Red China. We'd get alerted. We'd get a top-secret message that a Blackbird was going to be in our area at such-and-such a time. So, we'd have to blow up our scopes, which went out to three hundred miles, and monitor that.

We knew what it was painting on the scope, its signal, in case something happened. In case they declared an emergency, had to ditch or something like that, we could be on top of it and help them and send anybody we had to after them. Well, you blow up your scope and the thing would go, "Boop, boop," and it'd go [by very quickly]. That's how fast those suckers flew. It's still the fastest aircraft ever. Basically, it's a reconnaissance aircraft.

I had the opportunity [to see one] when I was in [Richmond]. I lived and worked in Richmond back in the mid-90s. The guy at the Air Museum there, when they retired these things, he bought one. I mean, when I say he bought one, they wouldn't give him the engines, the actual engines. So, the last week I was there, at night, I went out and he had it, at that time, in front of the museum. I walked under it and I admired it. It, along with the A-10, are my two favorite aircraft. You know what the [Fairchild Republic] A-10 Warthog [Thunderbolt II] is?

SI: Yes.

DF: The best tank killer ever made. That's the one I wish I would have been a pilot of. So, anyhow, that was kind of a treat, to actually see and touch the plane that I had seen on my scope for a few minutes. [laughter]

SI: Was a typical day there similar to what you described earlier in Texas?

DF: Yes, it was boring. I mean, in Texas, we monitored the Mexican border for, quote, "intruders" or bandits or whatever you want to call them, "unknowns," but there wasn't much going on unless you had a exercise, like I explained to you before, a controlled thing where you had low-level intercepts you would practice. It was all practice, if you will. There wasn't any hot stuff going on.

Occasionally, there would [be an unknown aircraft]. We'd have to fly somebody after [them]. Somebody would wander across the border and be unidentified and you had to identify them.

Usually, our control tower or one of the bases could identify them by voice, but, if you didn't, then, you'd have to scramble somebody to go out and check it out, that kind of thing.

Occasionally, we did intercepts against B-52s coming across and that kind of thing, but, by and large, I'm trying to remember the term that the one captain used down in Sweetwater, it was, "Hours and hours of extreme boredom given several minutes of extreme panic," [laughter] that kind of thing, or excitement, where you had these aircraft under your control and a guy's life in your hands if you messed up. I've told a couple of the incidents related to that, but, by and large, it was boring.

SI: Was there more "action," I suppose would be one word, when you were in Taiwan?

DF: Yes, there was more going on, more to monitor, more to learn. When I wasn't learning, I was trying to practice Chinese and learn Chinese, although you'd ask, "Oh, how do you say this word?" and the guy would write it in characters. You'd go, "No, no, I need it phonetically." [laughter] To learn Chinese, you have to learn it spoken, and then, you'd have to learn it written, too. Written, you know they have thousands of characters and all that kind of stuff, but there was more going on. Again, during breaks, we'd play basketball and all that kind of stuff. So, I mean, it was a great year I spent there.

SI: Were there any crises or moments of panic that stand out in your memory?

DF: Well, we'd fly things at Red China stuff, but there were no [problems]. The biggest crises came [when] we were hit by a typhoon a couple times. I was arguing with my commander in Taipei, which was two hundred miles away, about whether I should evacuate or not. I had one of my airmen fall in a *benjo* ditch [human waste pit] and dislocate his shoulder. I had to take him to a local hospital because there was no treatment there at the base, and that was a trip.

So, there were things moments like that. I was responsible, being the detachment commander. There were times when you had to discipline an airman or something like that, but nothing really that dramatic. If I had been Vietnam, it'd been a different story.

SI: You mentioned that the assassinations of King and Kennedy really hit home during that year that you were away. Was there much of a reaction among the men at the base?

DF: Yes. I think it was [prominent], again, since there was only a handful of us. Well, first of all, when JFK was killed, I still remember going and talking to my dad on the phone about it, calling him up, just being blown away by it, because I was at Rutgers. He's shot, and then, I'm doing my laundry and watching the TV when Jack Ruby killed …

SI: Oswald.

DF: Oswald. It's like, "What the hell is going on?" I run back to the fraternity house, because they had a TV and stuff like that, to see what the hell was happening. So, that was that part of it.

Bobby Kennedy was really an intriguing person and I knew a little bit about his background, and, of course, Martin Luther King. I mean, being over in a foreign country at the time and seeing this happen, you're wondering, what's going on with your country? "What is happening? Why this violence? Why this killing of the best?" if you will.

[Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas. Lee Harvey Oswald, the primary suspect in the assassination, was killed by Jack Ruby on live television days later. On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated by James Earl Ray as he stood on a hotel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. On June 5, 1968, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, campaigning for the Democratic nomination for President and having just won the California primary, was assassinated by Sirhan Sirhan in a hotel kitchen in Los Angeles, California.]

I remember listening late at night when we found out about it, about with Bobby Kennedy. I remember driving in Tainan with my wife and hearing about the assassination of King on the radio. It's like, "What? What is going on?" So, it was a shock, I think. The three other officers, I think, reacted kind of the same way.

The airmen, I think they were stunned, too, but I don't think they really understood the gravity of the whole thing at the time. I don't think they were that political. They were real young. A couple of them were eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one years old. The one guy that was an older airman, he understood; McKinnon, his name was. He knew what was going on, but the other guys, I think they were too young to really fathom what was happening.

SI: What was your relationship like with your fellow officers, and, also, with the airmen in your command?

DF: Well, the airmen, it was fine. We were in close quarters. They maintained the comm equipment and all that kind of stuff, so, they weren't up where I was. I had good relationships with a number of the Taiwanese, the Nationalist Chinese, officers, good friends with the liaison officer there and another captain who became a good friend.

The officers, I had kind of a strained relationship with one, because I think he felt that he should've been in command and not me, but I outranked him by about three weeks. We became friends after we went back to the States, not real close friends, but he was stationed at Tyndall for a period of time when I was there. We'd do things socially with the wives. Another guy came in a little later. He was young. We never did get close. He brought his wife over, but, then, I left a couple months later.

I'm trying to remember. Oh, then, the one, Porter Quantz, we became good friends, saw him in the States later on. He was the scuba diver and kind of a free spirit. He wasn't really [straight-laced], although he's the one that stayed in the military, which was kind of funny. He married a gal whose father was a colonel in the Army. We were friendly, but, again, he was kind of a free spirit. At the time, he wasn't real down-the-road military.

The other two, I don't think they stayed in the military beyond their commitment and I never got close with them. We exchanged Christmas cards for a period of time, for a few years, and then, kind of lost touch.

SI: You returned to Tyndall. Do you remember approximately what month that was?

DF: Yes. I think it was in June, May or June, something like that. Yes, it was May or June, pretty sure that's about the time, might've been April, I'm not sure. It was springtime type of thing, yes. Again, the squadron there, I ironically became an instructor of radar, of manual radar. We had to go through a training and that kind of thing. You had to give, deliver, these little speeches. I remember one of them--and I got high marks for it--I delivered on "The Great Pumpkin," you know Charlie Brown?

SI: Yes.

DF: On why you should believe in "The Great Pumpkin," but, then, they got more serious as you're going along. Then, you had to practice. It was kind of like practice teaching. That's what it was, really. You were becoming an instructor in how you taught the radar, the basic radar concepts and all that kind of stuff. That was interesting.

Ruthie was pregnant by that time with our first child. In fact, Debbie, who now has two kids of her own and she's almost fifty, she was conceived in Taiwan. Then, she was born in Tyndall in '68, in December of '68. The military provided good support for that kind of stuff. It was on the airbase, in the airbase hospital. I remember that like it was yesterday. So, that was fortunate, too, in many ways.

Then, as the year went by, I mentioned, with the assassinations and everything happening, I had gotten interested and started applying and looking into schools. I applied to four. I applied to Bryn Mawr in Philly, their graduate program in social work. I applied to Boston University where my friend went, got accepted there. I got accepted at Rutgers right away.

I mentioned why I didn't get accepted at Columbia, because of community organization, basically. All the placements were in the African-American communities, Bed-Sty, Harlem, but that's the one I really wanted to go to, because I had read a lot of the stuff about it and all that. In any event, grad school was a good experience, too.

As far as Tyndall went, I enjoyed it. Panama City was okay. It has a big paper plant there. If the wind was blowing in the wrong direction, you didn't want to be smelling that stuff, a pulp plant.

SI: Yes.

DF: But, it had beautiful beaches, white sand beaches. I did some volunteer work for the Boys'--well, at the time, it was just the Boys' Club. I mentored a little group. I got a little group because I wanted to practice, get into some social work stuff, to see if I was meant to do it. These kids were African-American and we formed a little group called "The Strivers," to help

them get through school and stuff. So, I did that on a volunteer basis while I was doing my shtick in the Air Force.

Then, I applied, as I say, while I was in the Air Force. When I had leave, I went up and that's when I did the interview at Columbia and ran down to Rutgers, and rented a place. I rented a place from a Rutgers alum who just died last year--died in '16, not '17, he died in '16, I think--Abe Suydam. The Suydam name is …

SI: Sure. [Editor's Note: Abram J. Suydam, Jr., '51, a long-time Rutgers University Trustee, passed away in 2016.]

DF: And the Suydam Farms on 27. I rented his old farmhouse while I was in grad school and became close friends with him and went to a lot of football games and basketball games. He died and his wife died shortly thereafter in 2016. Like, for instance, when my daughter came out here to school, she'd have dinner with them occasionally. She was born in Middlesex Hospital, my youngest, Vanessa, and lived the first, almost, year of her life in that house. So, anyway, it was interesting.

SI: Do any professors from your graduate school experience stand out?

DF: I'm trying to remember the title she had--Barbara Rice, her name is--she was my, I don't know what's [the term, if] facilitator is the right word. She oversaw my work and my experience in my social work placements. There were a number of others, but she, in community organization, saw that my placement was running okay and everything was fine.

I kept in touch with her for a long time. I've lost touch with her now. She may be dead now, I don't know, but she was a chain-smoker. [laughter] She was really neat and single and real committed. There were a number of others, Audrey Faulkner, who was a professor at the time. I'm trying to remember a couple of other [people]. Well, there was also a Faulkner in community organization.

[Editor's Note: Dr. Audrey O. Faulkner served on the faculty of the Rutgers Graduate School of Social Work for twenty-three years and founded the Gerontology Institute.]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We can go for another hour or so.

DF: Yes, that's fine.

SI: We were talking a little bit about professors at the School of Social Work. In general, how well do you think your education in the Graduate School of Social Work prepared you for the career that you found yourself in later?

DF: Well, community organization helped throughout my career, I think. We community organizers think of ourselves--or at least at that time--considered ourselves a kind of different

breed. There were four concentrations. There was casework, group work, administration, and community organization. Community organization was closest to what [I wanted]--activism, that kind of thing, going into a community and helping them organize around a goal to achieve, the whole thing with the assassinations and all that kind of thing, helping minority communities, helping poor communities, that kind of thing.

So, my placements, for instance, my first placement was in the Elizabeth school system, in a middle school that was largely African-American. That was interesting, but, then, because of Barbara Rice--she had been the executive of the YWCA in Plainfield. The whole drug thing was starting to come to the fore. A group at the YWCA, who she knew, and was headed by the executive and another community person that was a close friend of hers, was looking for somebody to help them create a service for kids that were getting involved in drugs and possible suicide and that kind of thing.

So, Barbara said, "Hey, would you be interested in doing this?" The school, they were on break or whatever it was, and I said, "Sure, I'll sit in." So, I sat in on one of their meetings. They had heard about these, quote, "hotlines," crisis intervention services, that kind of thing. They were looking at possibly developing something like that in the YWCA for helping the community, but particularly helping youngsters who were getting involved in drugs and that kind of thing.

So, I ended up writing a grant for the [State] Law Enforcement Planning Agency. That's the name of it--it was SLEPA, or something like that. We got, I got, I don't know, it was twenty-some thousand dollars or whatever. I think it was a two or three-year grant. We got it funded and I became the operator of that.

We had a big room and we had a little office--and this office was about a third of the size of this room--up on the second floor of the YWCA in Plainfield, right there on the main drag. We had a big room where we had the phones and stuff. We weren't open twenty-four hours/seven; we were open, like, four or five days a week, for twelve to fourteen hours a day. I trained volunteers as crisis intervention people to answer the phones. We had a recording system.

I visited a number of [hotlines]. I visited up in the Twin Cities and I visited a couple other hotlines that were operating. I went to a training at Carleton College in Minnesota. I don't know whether you've ever heard of Carleton College or not. Back when I went through, was going through the one seminar one time up there, Vice-President Mondale came in to talk to us. Anyway, I visited a number of places. We put together a package that went into the application.

[Editor's Note: Walter F. Mondale, a Democrat, served as a US Senator from Minnesota from 1964 to 1976. He served as Vice President of the United States from 1977 to 1981 under President Jimmy Carter.]

Then, I had to set that up, and I had this little, tiny office right next to the call room. I was the one that, if somebody didn't show up or we had a hole, I had to fill in, or I took the phones, at times, at night at home. We'd have prank calls, we had real calls; we had suicide calls, we had drug calls--and I did that. That was in 1970, '71 to '73.

Then, I was involved in writing the grant to fold it into a youth service bureau in Union County, which we did, because I wanted to go back to school. I mean, it was driving me nuts anyway. It was a very lonely job. I had two other staff members, one guy that helped me coordinate the volunteers and stuff and would also substitute. He lived right up the street from me in Plainfield, Pete Jones, his name was, a really nice guy and a real committed guy. Then, we had a secretary, part-time secretary. So, those are the three staff members, and then, all the rest were volunteers.

Running forty, sixty volunteers in something like that is a real trip. Eventually, handling crisis calls and stuff, it grinds you down after a period of time. So, I was suffering a little bit of burnout. I decided I wanted to go back and get my teaching certificate, which I eventually did, did some practice teaching, then, full-time substitute teaching, Plainfield High School, but, then, again, [felt sapped].

Then, I got a job with the NJ Department of Corrections. A friend of mine said, "Hey, I'm leaving this position. Would you be interested in it?" It was in Plainfield and it was the, quote, "assistant superintendent." It was a big, old home. It doesn't exist there anymore. It was on Watchung Avenue, I think. We housed about fourteen to sixteen delinquent kids from three different counties, from Middlesex, Union and Somerset Counties.

So, we had a mixture of white, Latino and African-American kids, fourteen to sixteen--well, fourteen to seventeen, because it went up to eighteen--if they get in trouble [Mr. Fell makes a negative noise]. It was built around the Highfields concept [originally a camp for at-risk youth in Central Michigan in 1962], which is positive peer group.

I was responsible for running that, overseeing the groups. We had, I don't know, a staff of about six to ten guys that were there overnight, the house people. We had a cook, we had the social work types that worked with the group, and I worked with a group, too. Then, I also ran the recreation part of it. I started a basketball [team], or got a basketball team and put it in the local league, and coached that and this kind of thing.

So, I ran the rec part of that and that was a lot of fun. I mean, I enjoyed that job. It was, I think, rewarding, although we had some really tough kids. We had kids that murdered a couple people, eventually, after they left us. We had kids that were successes, too, and, really, a big age range, again, a racial thing. In that case, you didn't see much of the results of your work. They left after a period of time or they ran away or they went back, they went to a more secure facility. We had success and we had failure, just like anybody else.

Then, again, that was the same time that my wife wanted to get back to the Midwest. So, I just basically resigned my job and we moved to Winona, Minnesota. Again, as I mentioned before at the beginning, went through kind of a culture shock in a small Minnesota river town, but, then, found my way, through Barbara Rice again. She recommended, "Hey, why don't you look into the YMCA?" I was on the phone with her one day when I was living out there and kind of struggling, looking for a new direction. I was working in a group home at the time, again, for delinquent kids. She says, "Why don't you look into YMCAs?"

So, what I did was, there was kind of a clearing house or regional office for the YMCA at the time in the Twin Cities. I just called them up, out of the blue, and I said, "Hey, I'm interested. This is a little bit about my background. I'd like to just come and have an interview, to kind of get a feel of what a career in the Y might be like," blah, blah, blah. "Oh, okay, sure, come on up." They scheduled me for an interview. I went up and I talked to them.

While I was sitting there, they had me meet with a personnel person. Then, they had me meet with this guy that was head of that unit. While I was meeting with the personnel person, she said, "There's a position that you might be interested in over in Milwaukee. Why don't we call them?" [laughter] So, she, right there, called them and said, "Was that position still open for a community," not a community development person, but a community coordinator type thing, second-in-command to a guy in a non-facility branch of the Greater Milwaukee YMCA.

So, I set up an interview right there, and then, went over and interviewed with this guy. He told me later he almost didn't hire me, because he felt I was overqualified and I was in my thirties. So, I was older than the normal, typical candidate. Like a month or so after he hired me, they moved him to another branch, to open a branch. Because of my age and stuff like that, and my background, they offered me the job. It was a non-facility Y, had been a facility at one time. They had the goal of making it a full facility.

Well, short of it was, I was there thirteen years. We were in an office building. We had this fourteen acres of land with an old farmhouse and barn on it. So, anyway, I took the ball and ran with it. Here's where community organization came in very, very handy, because my board at the time was only two people. [laughter] The board had dwindled. There was very little program, a few programs, youth programs. So, we started gearing it up. I started recruiting board members.

You had to raise money. Each of the branches had to raise a certain amount of money to support annual programs; started doing that. Fortunately, my supervisor in one of the big branches taught me everything I knew, at the time, about fundraising, which helped tremendously. It helped because we did an annual campaign to support programs. Then, in our branch, eventually, after creating programs and renting facilities in high schools and in elementary schools and stuff to run daycare or inter-care and youth sports programs and all this kind of stuff, we got to a point that we could launch a capital campaign.

I went through all that. We had to raise a certain amount of money in our area, and we covered the greater southwest part of Milwaukee, seven different, distinct communities and part of Milwaukee. Then, the central board raised a good portion of the money, we raised a chunk of the money. Then, we had to get fifteen hundred members to sign up before we even opened the facility. It took off because there was suddenly a pent-up demand for a Y in that area.

We built a facility and opened a facility in 1987 and it grew from there. In fact, I ran it for six years. Then, I was told that I really should run my own shop. Well, there's a long story behind that--I won't go and bore you with that--but ran that. We started it. I left there in 1993. I ran it from 1980 to 1993 and came East, to York, Pennsylvania, which York, Pennsylvania, is not my favorite city, let's just say that.

I went to a Y there and it turned out to be a disaster. They didn't tell me the truth about their financial condition. Then, I got depressed, I got clinically depressed, because I didn't sleep for four months. That's not a lie, that's not an exaggeration--anyway, got through that, left that and, actually, took a demotion, went to a Y down in Richmond, Virginia, in one of the branches of the Greater Richmond Y, and ran that for a couple of years.

Then, [I] had a board member, I found out later, that was on the interview committee that didn't want to hire me. He proceeded, from day one, to get rid of me, okay, and it was really funny. I had a hip replacement, because I have osteoarthritis. I have two hip replacements, but that was my first one, my right one. I had the hip replaced. While I was convalescing, my boss called me and said, "Could I come out and see you?" I said, "Why? You going to come out to fire me?" He [said], "Well, wait until I get out there."

So, Ruthie, my wife, was sitting there, and my kids were out of the house [for] a long time by then. This was in '95 and '96, and, yes, he proceeds to [let me go]. I knew where it was coming from. Again, this guy on my board had been working to get rid of me. He was very evident in board meetings. He didn't like me at all and all this kind of stuff. So, [in] any event, he fired [me]--he asked me for my resignation.

Then, three o'clock that afternoon, he called me back and offered me another job in the organization, [laughter] as a community development person, if he could move another person from A to B, from one branch to another. It turned out that the other branch wouldn't accept that person. So, for six months, I worked--I raised $250,000 dollars in funding for them--on a big grant that I wrote, but, then, I left.

I worked out of the inner-city branch, at that time, down in Richmond, Virginia, "the black branch." A friend of mine, the executive there, and I worked together, but that's where I wrote this. I wrote the grant, basically, for him and what we called our Black Achievers Mentoring Program. It's a long-established program in the YMCA.

Then, I went to work for a professional fundraiser and raised close to seven million dollars to renovate an old, abandoned high school in Petersburg, Virginia, which is thirty miles south of Richmond, a real successful campaign. I had a really good group of people working on it. That's why we're successful, but this is all community organization stuff, and fundraising, which [is] where I'd cut my teeth for seventeen years in the Y. That was real successful.

I went on to a couple other ones, similar ones, but they didn't turn successful, because our boss, my boss at the time, got us fired, because of shenanigans he was doing. So, in any event, by then, it was 2000. I was on a project and that closed, another fundraising project. I got them a million dollars, my first million-dollar gift from a foundation, but, again, that's the one where my boss eventually got us fired. I handed him a million-dollar check and, like, two months later, we were gone. [laughter] I mean, fund[raising], which I never thought I'd like, fundraising was a real strong suit for me.

So, in any event, my daughter's husband, meaning Vanessa's husband here, was finishing up med school here and stuff. So, he was looking for placement. Also, he had completed his PhD, too, for Rutgers. So, he had an MD/PhD. He was looking at different [institutions], at Yale, and his lab instructor was pushing him to Yale. He wanted to go to Duke, but they kind of screwed around with his application.

They eventually accepted him, but too late, because my wife and daughter said, "Well, why don't you look into [the] Mayo Clinic?" You know what the Mayo Clinic is, right? So, he accepted a [position]. He went out there, they loved him. They gave him a six-year fellowship, then, he went on staff. He was out there fifteen years. We moved over there in 2010, after I retired, and I'll tell you about that in a sec.

Then, in 2015, Merck came calling and recruited him away and gave him an offer he couldn't turn down. He's from Jersey. He's originally from Rahway. He went to--he wrestled for--Indiana University, and then, came back to New Jersey for grad school and med school. So, that's how I end up being here. We still live in Rochester, Minnesota. My wife has family out there. People say, "Well, you moved to Rochester for your daughter. Aren't you going to move to Jersey?" I said, "No, I don't think so, too damn expensive to live out there."

Anyway, my wife loves [it], Mayo Clinic is our medical facility and, in the meantime, I had another hip replacement when we were there in 2012. My last gig, my last professional gig, was after I did this professional fundraising thing. We moved them to Rochester, this project ended. So, I said, "Well, I'm not tied down for any reason," and we were just renting. So, we moved back to Milwaukee, where we lived for twenty-some years.

I got a job with the Paralyzed Veterans of America. I think it helped that I was a vet. I had done a lot of work with disability work in my Y in Milwaukee. At the time when we built the thing, we made it completely accessible. I was a wheelchair basketball player at the time, because of my hips. So, we started attracting all these folks with disabilities and setting up programs for them and all that kind of stuff. We got known for that, won awards for that.

So, that helped me get this job with the Paralyzed Vets. So, for six years, I was their executive director for what they call the Wisconsin Chapter. There's thirty-five chapters of Paralyzed Vets; helped them set up their fundraising apparatus. My board, on that board, you have to be a paralyzed vet, by either disease or injury, a voting board member. So, again, six years, I did that.

Then, 2008 hit, the financial crash, and our fundraising started to go south. I had a real difficult board member that was complaining and moaning and groaning. So, I said to them, "Okay, I'll cut back to half time." So, for a few months, I cut back to half time. Then, I cut back to quarter time. Then, he kept moaning and groaning. I said, "Hey, I'm going to retire." [laughter] So, anyway, it still was a good gig. I enjoyed it. I met a lot of neat people, learned a lot.

Now, my big thing is, I'm writing a grant for the Rotary Club, in an international thing. Also, over the years, through, well, in the '80s, I used to go down to Honduras, as part of my job with the Y, to see if we could start international programming with them. I met a lot of people there.

Then, for years, I didn't do that. Then, when I joined this one church in New Berlin, where we were living at the time, New Berlin, Wisconsin, they were going to Honduras on mission work.

So, I started going down there with them again and got involved in mission work, in particular, optometric work. I've done that for several years, up until last year, when I had this twenty-year-old hip [done]. I had to get it revised. So, I couldn't go down, and they're not going down this year. So, I'm writing a grant for Guatemala right now, for a water sanitation system.

That's kind of stalled right now, not because of me, but because of the person that invented the thing. Anyway, so, that's where I'm at right now, doing volunteer work for the Rotary Club. That's why we're sitting here right now, I guess.

SI: Yes, there are probably many things that I could dive into, but I just have two more questions.

DF: Sure.

SI: First, I would like to go back to the protest you mentioned at Rutgers, the march across New Brunswick. Tell me a little bit about how that came about. It was in reaction to Kent State, but how did the actual organization of it come about? What did you do?

DF: Well, I was sitting in the Graduate School of Social Work when that had just happened. It was on the news. We were sitting downstairs in our, I don't know what, social/break area. A bunch of us were talking about how horrible this was, and we shouldn't be in Vietnam anyway.

Going back to when I first started graduate school--you know, short hair, right out of the military--we were doing a project studying one of the neighborhood houses in New Brunswick. So, they wanted somebody to interview people over at Johnson & Johnson. Everybody looked at me, [laughter] "Hey, Don, you were in the military. You've got short hair. You go." In other words, I wasn't a hippie type, that I could go over there and interview [people]. So, I did that, but, then, I said to myself, "You know…" [laughter]

We had a sixteen-month program with a month break. So, I started growing my hair, had long hair. I remember sitting in my community organization class. The professor, who knew me, was calling roll. I had affected granny glasses and I had, again, long hair, and I had a headband. He kept calling my name and I kept saying, "Here, here." [laughter] He's looking around. Finally, it dawned on him who I was. So, anyway, that's just a little anecdote.

What were we talking about?

SI: You were sitting in the school lounge after the Kent State news broke.

DF: Oh, anyway, I graduated from Graduate School of Social Work as the outstanding student in the class, as elected by staff and students, but I wasn't the president of the class. He happened to be a South African kid. We were sitting around talking, he and a number of other people. We

started saying, "We've got to do something. What can we do?" There were protests starting to spring up related to it.

I mean, they basically killed these students for nothing. They teargassed, and then, they [shot them]. I mean, that was really the crux of it. We just said, "We've got to do something." So, we started talking about what we could do, how we could show our support for the students at Kent State, how we could show our nonsupport for the government and what they had just done in Ohio. You know the song, "They're killing us in Ohio." You know what song I'm talking about?

SI: Yes, Crosby, Stills and Nash. [Editor's Note: The Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young protest song *Ohio*, written by Neil Young, derides the National Guardsmen who shot and killed four students during a protest at Kent State University on May 4, 1970.]

DF: Yes, right. So, I mean, it wasn't just me, but I was one of the several people [who] looked at [it]; I don't know who came up with the idea. I can't swear it was me.

It could've been just kicking around ideas about how we could protest, how we could show how upset we were by this. Then, we started talking about what that was, and then, "Hey, why don't we have a march?" Again, I don't know who, could've been any one of us, that brought that up. I don't pretend that it was me. It could've been, it could've been not, but I think it came up organically, really.

We said, "Okay, well, where are we going to march? What's it going to be?" Then, we recruited some speakers from the University and our students would [speak]. I was going to speak and our president of our class was going to speak. We said, "Okay," and then, we talked about where we would march. It was going to be a candlelight procession from Douglass College, I think from the student center there, across New Brunswick and to Kirkpatrick Chapel.

That's what we did. I don't remember [the route]; we didn't come down George Street or anything like that. We contacted the police and all that kind of stuff. So, they planned it and they held traffic at cross things and all that kind of stuff. I don't even remember how many--we had several hundred. I'd be probably exaggerating to say if we had over a thousand, but we had a fairly substantial number of people. It made the press and all that kind of stuff, but it was just our way of saying how upset and how sad we were by what happened.

I mean, I can still see that picture of that one gal, that gal screaming with the one student laying with the blood on the pavement. It just was such a waste. I mean, Vietnam was a waste, but 1970, 1970--so, that's how it really came about. I mean, we, the School of Social Work, students from the School of Social Work, are the ones that organized it. I think it was primarily guys, people, that were in the community organization curriculum, although we had a lot of other people that were supporting it in our class.

SI: Do you remember being involved in any other antiwar activities at that time?

DF: Well, I mean, there were classes and stuff like that, and there were a lot of discussions about that. Yes, we had a big, general, wide demonstration, I think it was after that, yes, or before that. The Mets won the World Series in, what, '69?

SI: 1969, yes.

DF: Yes, that was preceding this demonstration, because Kent happened in '70. Yes, we had a big demonstration, Willie the Silent, within that green area there. There were signs that went up and we had a chant, "If the Mets can win the World Series, we can get out of Vietnam." [laughter] We did a small march there, around campus, up and down the sidewalks and stuff like that, with signs and whatnot. So, I was involved in that. We would joke about that, because, here, I came straight out of the military into grad school and started protesting the war.

SI: I know, at the time, there was Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and then, there were also other veteran-based groups that were antiwar. Were you involved in any of those?

DF: Well, at that time, I don't believe they existed, or they were just starting. I was, at a time, just a member, a financial supporter, of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and a couple of other organizations that I gave my money to. I wasn't active with them in the sense like I was at grad school and stuff, but, again, I supported them. I supported those kind of activities and stuff.

I think, just as a side note, I got an interview at Columbia because they thought I was black, because of the organizations I belonged to. I belonged to Jim Brown's--Jim Brown formed an organization right after he got out of football. You know who I'm talking about, Jim Brown?

SI: Yes.

DF: And a number of other organizations that I belonged to. I belonged to his organization, I belonged to a number of other organizations, that a person, if they looked at my résumé, might think that I was African-American. To this day, I think that's how I got an interview at Columbia, because I didn't have a picture on my résumé or anything.

Yes, I belonged to a number of organizations. I was a supporter of a number of organizations, not just antiwar, but community organization-type things that were activist-oriented. I mean, I worked in Plainfield. Plainfield was in the Kerner Commission for the riots.

[Editor's Note: President Lyndon B. Johnson created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders on July 28, 1967, to investigate the causes of civil unrest in Los Angeles' Watts section in 1965, Chicago's Division Street in 1966 and Newark and Detroit in 1967. Chaired by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner, Jr., the Commission issued "The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders" on February 29, 1968, which named white racism and a lack of economic opportunity as a major cause of frustration in the African-American community.]

SI: Yes, that was going to be my next question. You got there a few years after the riots and were there until the end of the decade. In general, what were your impressions of how that event affected the community?

DF: Well, I mean, there was a lot of white flight, had been a lot of the white flight out of Plainfield. We lived [there]. My oldest daughter went to [school there], and my youngest daughter went to kindergarten there, but my oldest daughter went through third grade there. Most of her classmates were African-American.

We lived up off of Dixie Lane and Harker's, whatever, Hollow, something--I can't remember what it was--a really nice area, but, again, she went to public school. All her friends--I have pictures of it--all her friends were black. I guess, because of my background, I believed strongly in not sending her off to private school. I didn't believe in white flight and all that kind of stuff.

As a matter of fact, I was offered the job of Assistant--Plainfield had, what kind of system, had a weak mayor and an administrator. I was offered the Assistant Administrator for the City of Plainfield, but I pushed it off to a friend of mine who was a black woman and suggested she go after it. I was offered the job--and, again, because my wife was making throes about moving and stuff like that, too--but I could've taken that job instead of the job at the--no, this was the job after the group home. So, Charlene Brown, her name was, she was an African-American woman, she took the job, but the guy that was the Administrator was a racist.

He was known for his racist views. I would've been working with this guy, [laughter] but I thought it was a good idea to get a black in there instead of another white guy. I can't remember his name. He eventually left. The Mayor was black, of Plainfield. So, he had some control, but this guy that was--no, I'm sorry.

Yes, it was recreation director, that's what it was, recreation director, Plainfield Recreation. He was the recreation [director], this would've been assistant recreation director. They wanted me in the position to balance this guy, to counteract this guy's racist views, because, at the time, I was coaching a team in this league that was primarily African-American.

I took my kids in the group home to the one rec area, the rec center that was African-American. That had a boxing program, because these kids would think they're real tough stuff. This guy ran a regulation boxing thing and I could get the kids to join it. They'd brag about how tough they were. I'd take them down there. They'd apply the stuff to their faces and stuff and have them go into the ring and make them stay there for three minutes. These guys [laughter]--they didn't come out very [tough].

I was also involved, when I was at the group home--you know what Scared Straight is?

SI: Yes.

DF: We were the first group home to go when they first started the Scared Straight over in Rahway State Prison. I remember, these guys scared the crap out of my kids, had them crying. I mean, these were lifers. One guy pulls up his shirt--we're sitting in the audience in this auditorium and they were up on stage with these guys--pulls up, he says, "You want this?" He has all these knife wounds in his body where he got knifed in prison.

Anyway, it was all real interesting. Yes, I was offered that position, but I suggested my friend, because I just didn't see myself [in it] as a long-term position. Yes, it was rec director, it wasn't administrator, assistant recreation director for the City of Plainfield.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record?

DF: No, I think that kind of covers the gamut.

SI: You can always add things later to the transcript.

DF: Yes, I think I made some notes. Yes, I mentioned Bruce Lawrence; yes, we went through all that stuff.

SI: He is on the …

DF: He's on the wall.

SI: The one at Rutgers that your class created?

DF: I'm pretty sure he is. I don't know that for a fact. I know I've seen a picture of [it]; I haven't been at the wall. I've been at the Wall [in Washington, DC] a number of times, but I hadn't found his name. Then, I saw there was a photo of it, what line it was on, and so, I have seen his name on the Wall.

SI: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

DF: Yes, no problem.

SI: Thank you.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 1/30/2020
Reviewed by Zach Batista 2/12/2020
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 2/18/2020