

AL 154

Interviewee: Edward F. Roberts

Interviewer: Stuart Landers

Date: October 22, 1992

L: This is an oral history interview with Edward F. Roberts. It is being conducted in his classroom at Beasley Middle School in Palatka, Florida. Today is October 22, 1992, and my name is Stuart Landers. What does the *F* stand for?

R: Farnell.

L: Is that a family name?

R: That is my mother's maiden name before she got married.

L: When and where were you born?

R: I was born at Alachua General Hospital in Gainesville, but my parents lived in Worthington Springs in Union County, a small town that did not have a hospital [and still does not]. That is why I was born at Alachua General.

L: What year was this?

R: 1945.

L: Tell me your parents' names.

R: My mother's name was Lois Farnell. She was married to my father; his name was Wesley William Roberts. He was in the naval stores business, and he also had a [gasoline] business, working for a large petroleum company. It was named Cities Service. The company no longer exists. He was a consignee. He went around servicing gas stations, and he owned several trucks.

My grandfather on my father's side was a very wealthy man. He owned a lot of land down in Worthington Springs, and he owned a big old store down there. When he was a young man he had gone off to the Alaska gold rush and done fairly well. When I was a little boy he used to have a huge gold nugget that was attached to a watch that he carried in his vest pocket. During the 1920s he started growing Sea Island cotton, and he became very wealthy. When the boll weevil hit, he switched over to timber growing, [especially] pine trees, from which they made turpentine and paint thinner.

L: What was his name?

R: His name was Robert Benjamin Roberts.

L: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

R: I have seven. When I was five years old my mother divorced my father and married another man, and I have two natural brothers. My oldest brother, Bill, lives in Madison County, and he is the principal of Bell Middle School. My younger brother, Dennis, is a public defender in Lake City. I think it is the Ninth Judicial Circuit. I am not sure about that. [My mother had three children by her second husband: Ruth, Charles, and A. C. Charles lives in Lake Butler, and Ruth and A. C. live in Macclenny, Florida.]

L: What was the stepfather's name?

R: His name was Lyman Green.

L: What did he do?

R: Most of it was illegal. [laughter] Well, he had a liquor store, and he did various illegal activities. Before there was the Florida Lottery there was something known as boleta. Boleta is a Spanish word that means little ball. The way the system worked is you bought a ticket on a number between 1 and 100, and Saturday after 6:00 they would have a drawing. They would play the game of boleta in Miami, and the word of what the number was was spread up the state; it would get up to Lake Butler and Union County about 10:00 that night. The way it worked was they had a bag with 100 balls in it, and the people would get in a circle and throw it around the room. When it made it all the way around the guy would hold the bag up and yell, "Boleta!" Then he would grab one of the corners of the bag, cut it open with a razor blade, and take a ball out, and that was the number. It paid off 60:1. Your chances of winning were 100:1, but it paid off 60:1. So if you bet a dime you would win six dollars. If you bet a quarter, you would win thirty dollars. He used to sell [a lot of] boleta tickets.

He also owned a liquor store that he used to bootleg. At that time Union County was a wet county, and it was surrounded by dry counties. Bradford County was dry, I think Columbia County was wet, but Suwannee County was dry, Alachua County to the south was dry, [and] St. Johns County was dry. There used to be a whole bunch of houses of prostitution in Lake City, St. Augustine, and other places, and during the week he would load up his car – it was a big old Buick – with whiskey, and me and my brothers would go around making deliveries. It was illegal as hell, and I was fourteen years old when I was doing this crap. I was also selling boleta tickets. On Sunday morning everybody who had a winning boleta ticket would come to our house. We lived way out in the country; we lived two and a half miles out of town. There were no houses within sight of us. Every [Sunday] morning I would wake up and look out, and there would be

ten to fifty cars out in the front yard of people who had come to get their boleta winnings.

L: Now, boleta was illegal, right?

R: Yes, it was illegal then. Today it is the Florida Lottery. To me, I think boleta was a better deal than the Florida Lottery. My mother would play boleta, and she would win about once a month. Hardly anybody wins anything with the darn lottery. But it was fun. The fact that it was illegal actually made it more fun. The sheriff and people like that were all in on it; they did not see any serious harm in it. The only people you really had to look out for were the state boys.

He also did some moonshining. They sold a whole bunch of illegal whiskey up in Jacksonville, too. The moonshine he sold mostly to black people. It cost seven dollars a gallon – that is cheap whiskey. Back then, also, there were all the naval bases up in Jacksonville. The drinking age was twenty-one, and he would sell whiskey to places up in Jacksonville that catered to sailors that were not of legal drinking age yet.

L: Did he ever run afoul of the law?

R: Well, he died in prison. It is a funny thing. As long as he was dealing with boleta and whiskey [he was all right]. He was arrested several times, but he was never convicted. Back then it was sort of the thing like the law would look the other way. They just did not consider that a serious problem.

In 1973, after I was grown, he switched from whiskey and boleta to selling marijuana, and they were in the marijuana business until 1985, when he was arrested in a motel up in Jacksonville on Lane Avenue. He had a bail of marijuana and a lot of cash. He got a year in prison. That is the first time he ever went to prison. He was up at Dinsmore Correctional Institution, and he fell in a shower and broke his hip. While he was at University Medical Center he died. He was seventy years old. I really had an interesting childhood, I am telling you [laughter].

L: Oh, yes. So you went to high school where?

R: Union County High School, [class of] 1964.

L: So I take it it was not integrated before you left?

R: No, it was segregated. I think it integrated in 1966.

L: Do you remember any racial conflict, any sort of civil rights movement, in Union

County?

R: No. In Union County, and you can check this if you want to, no black people were registered to vote – not a single one. I think about a third of the county was black, and it was rigidly segregated.

L: Do you remember anything else about Jim Crow or about the racial situation?

R: Well, when I was a little boy it got my butt whipped. My granddaddy had a store, and I had a big old cold drink, an RC Cola, and there was a little black boy who hung around the store. I would take a drink, and I would give him a drink. When my mama came out and saw me doing that she beat my behind and told me: "Don't never do that again! Don't ever let them [blacks] drink out of your cola bottle again." So I remember that much. Black people stayed in their part of town, and white people stayed in their part of town.

But really growing up I had a lot of contact with black people because of my stepfather's illegal activities. We used to go up to West Beaver Street to the black part of town in Jacksonville all the time selling moonshine and [red] whiskey. We also sold boleta tickets, a ton of boleta tickets, to black people. Sometime when I was around sixteen, I would take the car, and I would go down to the black part of town and just park the car and sit there, and people would come up and give me money and buy boleta tickets – quarter, dime, nickel. No, the smallest one that you could buy was a dime. But most of them bought quarter, half-dollar, or dollar boleta tickets. I would just take out the ticket, fill it out, and give it to them, and they would give me the money. So I have never had this fear of black people that other white people had because I used to deal with them all the time when I was a kid.

L: This boleta thing is very fascinating. Was it an honest game? I know it was illegal, but was it honest?

R: Yes, I think it was honest. The way you played boleta was you would have a dream, and you would wake up and say, "I dreamed about chickens last night." Then you would go get what they called a "dream book," and you would look up your dream in the dream book, and it would tell you what number to play. You could play two or three numbers for less than a dollar. I remember my mother would wake up and tell me she had dreamed about something, and she would tell me to look it up in the dream book. I would look it up in the dream book, and she would give me some pocket change to go get her some boleta tickets. White people played it, black people played it. I think it was probably as honest as the Florida Lottery is today. I know a lot of people won, a lot of people in the little communities, because if they did not win they would have quit playing. In fact, I won. When I was a kid I would bet a dime or a quarter or something [and

win]. I would bet a quarter and win thirty dollars. That was big money to a teenager.

The other thing I used to do when I was a teenager is we would go to North Carolina and get cigarettes. We would drive up to North Carolina and get a trunkful of cigarettes. I think in Florida cigarettes sold for thirty-five cents a pack, and you could buy them in North Carolina for twenty-two cents a pack. We would bring back a trunkload of cigarettes and take them around to what were called Working Man's Friends gas stations, independent gas stations, and these guys would buy them from you, and we would split the difference on the profit. They would sell them for thirty cents a pack, so you would make about five cents a pack, and the store would make about four cents a pack. So you could make a lot of money. We used to do that during the summer and school holidays. We would just take the car and just drive up to North Carolina and bring back a trunkload of cigarettes.

L: How long did this boleta thing last? When did it fade away?

R: When I went into the service in 1964 it was going strong. When I got out of the service in 1968, everything had changed radically. The schools were integrated. The 1960s had started. Exactly what happened to boleta during that period of time I really do not know. But I remember when LeRoy Collins was governor of Florida he did not like boleta, and he tried to stamp it out.

One other thing, too. Before Castro took power in Cuba, boleta came straight out of Havana. That is where the number was. Once Castro took over, I remember there was a long period of time when there was no boleta, and it was all confused. Finally it began out of Miami. It was a Cuban thing, and instead of coming all the way from Havana, it would come from out of Miami. Somebody told me this once – I do not know whether it is true or not – that they used to tell what the boleta number was on Cuban radio that you could hear in Miami, and it was listed as the price of eggs. There was a little town in Cuba, and they would say the price of eggs in this little town was so many cent a dozen, somewhere between 0 and 100, and that is what the boleta number was. From Miami it would just come right up the state of Florida.

L: That is fascinating. When did you join the service?

R: September 15, 1964.

L: Which branch?

R: United States Air Force.

L: Why the air force instead of the army?

R: I had an older brother who was in the navy. My objection to the navy was I did not like the navy uniform. I did not think I looked good in it. I remember when my older brother A. C. was in the navy he wore his navy uniform, and he had to put his cigarettes in his socks and his billfold in some weird place. I just did not like the navy uniform, and I did not want to wear that.

My brother Bill was in the army, and the whole time that he was in the army he was at Fort Benning, Georgia, or Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and I really did not want to spend all of my military time in Georgia and South Carolina. I wanted to go somewhere; I wanted to travel. We had a [family] friend who was an ex-marine, and he used to tell me war stories about sea duty, and I decided sea duty was not for me. The idea of being on one of those ships just did not appeal to me. He told me that you sleep in a bunk, and there were only about twelve or thirteen inches between him and the next bunk, and I am too claustrophobic for that.

Anyway, I also had a [step]brother named Charles who was in the air force, and he got to travel around quite a bit. That was my objective in 1964. I wanted to travel. I wanted to get out of north Florida. I wanted to go somewhere.

L: Did you know that you would eventually end up in Vietnam?

R: No. I joined in September of 1964. The Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred in August of 1964, and it was just another news story. I paid no attention to it whatsoever. I had been in the air force about eight months before people started talking about Vietnam. I had never heard of the place. I did not know anything about it. I had seen only one reference to it. There used to be a comic strip called "Buzz Sawyer." It is no longer in the papers. "Buzz Sawyer" did a thing one time about Communist guerrillas in Vietnam, and that is the only thing I had ever read about Vietnam. I never studied it in school. I did not know anything about it.

L: Where did you do your military training?

R: I went to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

L: What is boot camp?

R: Boot camp was in two phases. The first phase was eight weeks, and then the second phase after that was two or three weeks. I have forgotten. But I enjoyed boot camp, believe it or not. Most people do not. It is rough; it is tough, but I really liked it. When I first started out I was scared to death, and I thought, This

is horrible! and I started figuring out ways to get out of there. Then as it progressed it was a weird thing. It was not like I thought it would be. I actually began to enjoy it. I was a squad leader, which meant that I was in charge of some other men, and I started enjoying the power trip. And I enjoyed the uniform. I just started liking it; I really did. At that point I was almost considering the military as a career.

L: To back up just a bit, why did you enter the military to begin with?

R: To get the hell away from my parents. [laughter] My home situation was very bad, and I was sick to death of that little town, Lake Butler. Lake Butler is a very narrow-minded, bigoted place, and my mother and father . . . It was a bad situation, and when I graduated from high school I said, "I am out of here." I just wanted to get the hell away from home. That is all.

L: So you finished your boot camp training. Then what happened?

R: I went to McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas. I was in something called the Security Police. Around the city of Wichita were eighteen Titan 2 missile sites.

L: Nukes.

R: Nuclear missiles buried in underground shelters. What we did was we provided security for them. We had a big area to cover. We had two guards on each missile site. We flew out in helicopters or U-6A airplanes. We pulled a twenty-four-hour shift. Once you were on the complex you could work it any way you wanted to, but one guy had to be topside all the time patrolling the area, and the other guy was down sleeping. You had to work twelve hours; you could work it five-five-two, six-six. If it was real cold up there you might want to work it three-hour [rotations]: four on, four off, like that so you could get out of the cold. Kansas is a cold place, and I was a Florida boy, and I was not used to that. It is incredibly cold in the wintertime, and it is very hot in the summer, and there is no shade out on those missile sites. You just broil your brain.

L: So how long were you assigned to this job?

R: Well, I had that job, and then they also had something called internal shift. When you work internal you ride around in a trucks, three of you, with M-16s and revolvers, and you just patrol the missile sites. Each truck has so many missile sites [to patrol], and we would go from missile site to missile site, visiting with whoever was on duty at the missile site, checking to see if they needed anything or something like that. These guys worked what is known as a nine-and-three shift--they work three day shifts, three swing shifts, and three midnight shifts, and

then they got a three-day break. I did that for a while.

Whenever they would pull a missile out of the ground and refuel it, the missile site would be covered with all types of equipment, so we had a special detail that provided security for that. When they were refueling a missile, you worked, but the rest of the time it was – can I say shit? – detail. They spent [all their] time mopping floors, painting, and scraping. When you were not working [at a missile site] that was all you did.

L: Is this busy work, or is this just maintenance work?

R: Well, it was maintenance, it was busy work, it was keeping the area clean. They did not want you sitting around not doing anything, which is probably, looking back now, a good idea, because we were all eighteen- [and] nineteen-year-old boys, [and] we would have gotten in trouble, so they made us cut grass and stuff like that. But whenever a missile was being refueled, we would go out there. It was fairly easy duty, because all we had to do was sit in a truck and watch while the missile was being refueled.

Now, those Titan 2 missiles were liquid-fuel rockets, and I did not realize at that time how toxic that fuel is. I used to watch them just release it into the atmosphere, and it was a big old red cloud. It was deadly stuff.

Also, I pulled a lot of what was known as RV-topside duty. This is when the re-entry vehicle, the nose cone of the missile, was not on the missile but was sitting on a flatbed truck on top of the complex.

L: Now, the re-entry vehicle was the warhead. Right?

R: The warhead, the thing that comes falling down on the Russians.

They had something known as the two-man policy, which means any time a nuclear weapon is present, there had to be two people there, each one capable of detecting if the other guy does something wrong. Around the nuclear weapon there would be a fenced-off area, and there would be a sign that said "No Lone Zone." That means that no one person was allowed to be there by himself. It said, "SAC [Strategic Air Command] Two-man Policy Mandatory." We were responsible for enforcing the two-man policy. Of course, if there was one guard there by himself, he would be in violation of the two-man policy, so we always had to have two men on duty. We had a password. We could walk up to anybody who was on the site and ask him what the password was, and he had to give us the password.

Every morning we also went to something called code control, which was a little

room like a phone booth, and on the other side was a piece of glass. A guy would write down on a piece of chalk what the entry word and what the duress code was, the duress word. He would hold it up – he was not allowed to say it. All he could do was show it to us. And we were not allowed to write it down. So when you went out to the missile site and wanted to go in, you would pick up the telephone and . . . The person in charge was called an MCCC, missile combat crew commander, and you would give him the entry code, and he would let you in. If you were under duress and somebody had a gun to your head, you would give him the duress code.

Every now and then on the missile site some maintenance guy would forget what he was doing and say the duress code. The duress code could be Indian, cow, horse, dog, train, or whatever, and he would say the duress code. When that happened you had something known as a Seven-High condition, which means possible sabotage or possible espionage. Then if there was sabotage or there was a security break, it was known as a Redskin condition. The other thing was what we called Broken Arrow, which means a peacetime nuclear accident. For instance, if a B-52 crashed with an atomic bomb on board, that would be a Broken Arrow.

L: So how do you shift from doing this to ending up in Vietnam?

R: I was a very good soldier. I liked the military, and I wanted to do real well. I was put up for Sentry of the Month three times. That is a big honor. That means you are the sharpest dude in the outfit. I looked really good. I went to a lot of trouble to make sure my boots were spit shined and I looked good.

All the NCOs that I worked for really liked me, primarily because of my southern accent. They loved making fun of guys with southern accents. They liked having us guys from the South around. The senior NCOs just liked us. They got along real good with us. There was another guy named Bousalet. He was a cajun from Louisiana, and they really liked him, too. Bousalet and I used to get a lot of good details. Any time they wanted somebody special [they called us].

In September of 1965 the Department of Defense sent out a twix, which is a message. I do not know why they call it that. What they wanted were Security Police for something known as Project Top Dog Fifty. It was real secret, and nobody knew what Project Top Dog Fifty was, but it was in Thailand. They called me in and asked me if I wanted to go to Thailand, and I said: "Hell, yes. Let's go!" There were five of us that went [Roberts indicates a picture] – there was a staff sergeant in charge, McDonald, Powell, Wiggs, and me. This is taken at Hamilton Air Force Base, California. This was a TDY [temporary duty] assignment, which means you are not gone for good. You are going to come back.

L: Are you married at this point?

R: No, I was not married. We went to Hamilton Air Force Base, California, and they put us through five days of some of the hardest combat training I have ever been in. We fired mortars, we threw hand grenades, we fired M-16s, and it was very intense. We started at 5:00 in the morning, and we did not get back in the barracks until about 10:00 at night. We ate out in the field in a field kitchen. It was really rough.

The day we finished they took us to Travis Air Force Base [in California], and there was an ungodly long flight to Thailand. Once I got to Thailand we were at Don Muang Air Base in Bangkok, and the war was so new they did not even have barracks on this air base.

L: What sort of airplanes were stationed at this base? B-52s?

R: No. Don Muang was just where you came into the country. It was actually part of the commercial airport at Bangkok. They did not have any barracks there, so we all stayed in hotels downtown. You can have sex with a girl in Bangkok for two dollars short time and five dollars all night long. I thought I had died and went to heaven. I had never seen anything like it. We stayed in Bangkok for four days, and it was nothing but one huge drunken party and sex orgy.

Then they put us on a C-130 and flew us to Ubon. Ubon was about sixty or seventy miles from the Cambodian border. We had a concrete runway, and all the buildings had tin roofs, screen walls, and wooden sidewalks.

In Thailand we wore a type of Australian cowboy hat. We did standard Security Police duty. We guarded F-4C aircraft. The big deal and the big secret about Thailand was that from Ubon and Khorat and Udorn and the other bases in Thailand they were flying bombing raids against North Vietnam.

L: These are B-52s?

R: No, F-4Cs. It is a tactical fighter. I was with the 42nd Tactical Fighter Wing from MacDill Air Force Base [Florida]. They were there TDY too.

L: TDY?

R: Temporary duty. When you are transferred in the military you go TDY or PCS. PCS means permanent change of station; TDY means temporary duty. Most TDY assignments are 90 days or 120 days or 180 days. Mine was for 120 days.

I loved Thailand. We had hard duty. One time we worked fifty-five days straight

without a day off. It was hard duty, but the time you got to go downtown and party with the girls was something unbelievable. Eventually I got my own apartment off base that cost me only thirty dollars a month. I had two live-in girlfriends – I had my girlfriend and her sister. I had a *ti loc*; that is what you call your girlfriend in Thailand, your *ti loc*. She and her sister lived there with me, and it was a lot of fun. One day at guard mount they told me, "You are going home," and I said, "I do not want to go home." They said, "You are going to go home anyway." I almost went AWOL [absent without leave]. My girlfriend wanted me to go . . . She was from southern Thailand, and she kept telling me: "I will hide you. You go with me." Anyway, I said, "No, I had better go back."

There was one thing real interesting. When I was in Thailand I caught malaria, and they had to medivac me to a hospital in Khorat, Thailand. I was unconscious for a long time. The day I regained consciousness was the day there was an eclipse of the sun. I remember lying there in the bed, and all of a sudden it started getting dark. I looked at my watch, and it was around 12:00 noon, and I thought I was dying.

I was returned to Ubon on a C-130 all by myself. They flew a C-130 just for me! I was kind of impressed. There was me and a crew chief. I was on a stretcher, and I had on hospital pajamas and was asleep. I woke up, and the whole airplane was shaking like crazy. I looked out the window, and all I could see was trees flying by. I said, "Oh, my God, we have crashed in the damn jungle!" That is what came to my mind. All of a sudden the aircraft slowed real quickly, and it turned around. I saw one little hooch, a [small] little wooden building with an American flag in front of it. I looked over at the crew chief and asked, "Where the hell are we?" He said: "We are in Nakhon Phanom. Do you want to get some chow?"

Nakhon Phanom is in extreme northeast Thailand right on the Laotian border. So we got out, got in a Jeep, and went down this little two-lane, narrow dirt road like you are going out in the woods hunting or something. All of a sudden I look on my right, and I see this huge building just covered with antennas. The crew chief, who was a tech. sergeant, said, "They do secret shit around here." I said okay. Anyway, we went to this little mess hall, got something to eat, went back on the aircraft, and I flew back to Ubon. I did not find out until years and years later, when the Time-Life books on the Vietnam war came out, what they were doing. They were flying over the Ho Chi Minh Trail dropping sensors, little parachutes with sensors, and inside that building there were guys sitting at computer terminals listening to these sensors. When they heard some movement they would type it into the computer, and when the computer would see a pattern of movement, that is when they would call the aircraft to go over bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

L: Was this effective?

R: No. When I thought about it, I was thinking all the millions and millions of dollars – all those computers, all those electronic sensors – [that were wasted on this war]. We had aircraft in Thailand that had two crews. They had a steel bulkhead in the airplane, and the people who were in the front of the aircraft were not allowed to go in the back of the aircraft, and the people in the back of the aircraft were not allowed to go in the front of the aircraft. These aircraft were doing some very, very top-secret stuff over Laos. We used to have to guard those aircraft when they were on the ground, and I remember walking over there and looking through the door and getting my ass chewed. The guy said, "Do not look in there!" I said okay. It just makes me so mad thinking all the millions and millions and millions of dollars they spent. My God! We could have probably bribed the whole country of Vietnam for cheaper than that.

L: When do you end up at an air base in South Vietnam?

R: I came back from Kansas in the middle of the winter. I was freezing to death, and I wanted to get back to my girlfriend.

L: They shipped you from Thailand back to Kansas?

R: Yes, back to Kansas, and I wanted to get the hell out of Kansas. I have not lost a damn thing with Kansas. So I had two buddies of mine in personnel, and I went down there and said, "Get me out of here." He said, "Do you want to go bad?" and I said: "Yes. I want to go back to Thailand." He said, "I do not know if I can work that, but I can damn sure get you to Vietnam." I said okay.

L: This was 1965 still?

R: Well, I came back from Thailand after Christmas of 1966, sometime in January, and I finally got my orders to Vietnam in April of 1967. I flew through Travis Air Force Base to the Philippines. We had a lot of [problems with that flight]; the airplane kept breaking down. If this happened to me today I would be scared to death, but back then I was too young. I spent a few days in the Philippines at Clark Air Force Base. Then I flew to Saigon.

We arrived at Tan Son Nhut. In Bangkok we stayed in hotels, ate in restaurants, drank and screwed our brains out. When I got to Saigon it was radically different. We lived in transit barracks at Tan Son Nhut. They had gotten shelled the night before I got there. The bunker, the place where you were supposed to run to in event of a mortar attack, was a concrete bathhouse. They had one for officers and one for enlisted men. They told us [that] if we were being rocketed it was all right to go into the officers' bathroom [laughter]. The sidewalks had big

old hunks of cement blown out where the mortars had landed. We were in an area, and we were completely surrounded by cemeteries. I mean, if you opened the back door of the hooch and spit, you would hit a grave.

L: American or Vietnamese?

R: Vietnamese. Those Vietnamese cemeteries really bothered me because they were fenced in. The graves were all covered up with weeds. It really gave me the willies. The whole time I was at Tan Son Nhut I only went into Saigon one time. The rest of the time we were pulling shit details. We were filling sand bags, we were stacking tin, we were hammering, we were nailing, and I was really disgusted. I was ready to get the hell out of there.

L: Go back to Kansas? [laughter]

R: No. Do something. Let's leave here. Anyway, they flew me up to Cam Ranh Bay, and I was up there with the 12th Security Police Squadron. This base had just opened. It was a newly opened base, and it had a runway called porous steel planking. What they do is come in and bulldoze. Then they lay this stuff down in sheets. It is just like laying tile on a floor – instant runway. All the attack aircraft were behind revetments. They had little walls built around the aircraft so in case one aircraft exploded all the rest of them would not blow up.

L: This is what you described in your article ["Manning the Perimeter," *Vietnam* 3(3):42-49].

R: Yes, this is basically what I described in my article. The first six days – no, more like ten days – that I was there I did nothing from 7:00 in the morning till 5:00 in the afternoon except fill sand bags. They did this for two reasons. Number one, they needed sand bags filled. Number two, that gives you a little bit of time to get used to the place and still be able to get some sleep at night. We lived in eight-man [G.P. (general purpose)] tents. Each tent had a bunker next to it that you were supposed to jump into [in the event of a mortar attack].

Now, each tent had a hooch maid. She swept the place, brushed your shoes off, and was also responsible for washing your clothes. Each of us paid her a dollar a month; she got eight dollars a month. Now, the problem with letting a hooch maid wash your clothes is she does it in the shower – at the same time you are taking a shower, buck naked, the hooch maid is washing your clothes. They would wash them fairly good, but they did not rinse them very well. You would put on a uniform and go out on duty, and you would get caught in the rain, and all of a sudden you look down and have goddamn soap suds running all over the floor and everything else. You would come back complaining, but it did not do one bit of good.

The other problem is the bunkers. The problem with the bunker was there was no place on the base for these women to go to the bathroom, so they would go to the bathroom in the bunker. So if there was a mortar attack and you jumped in the bunker, you were in there with all the urine and human fecal matter. This is [a picture of] where we went to the bathroom. It was a plywood building screened, and you went in these buckets.

L: Right. That is a picture of you burning it, right?

R: Yes. Every morning they would pull the buckets out and set them on fire.

L: I bet that smelled wonderful.

R: It did not give that much odor. We used to kid guys when they first got there; we would tell them, "That is where we have our cookouts and stuff," and they would believe it [laughter].

These guys right here are going to chow.

L: Everybody had a mess kit?

R: Everybody had a mess kit, and when you went to mess hall you had to wash your own mess kit with what looked suspiciously like a toilet brush, the same kind you clean your toilet with. They had one when you go in. You just dumped your mess kit in there in boiling water. You go in there and get your food, and you had to take your quinine pills. That is how I caught malaria in Thailand, not taking my damn quinine pills. You had to take your quinine pills, you ate your chow, and then you had to go wash your own mess kit. You could not drink the water there. If you wanted to drink water, they had these things called water buffaloes, big old tanks of water. You could shower with the water and brush your teeth, but you just were not supposed to drink it. They gave us some water purification pills, but it made the damn water taste like bleach [laughter].

L: So what did you drink?

R: You could go down to the water buffalo and get some water.

L: OK.

R: A lot of people do not understand about the marijuana in Vietnam. It was impossible in that country to find a cold beer. People started smoking marijuana over there just because they could not get any cold beer.

My biggest problem in Vietnam was that we worked at night. We worked every

night; we seldom worked in the daytime. In those damn tents it was too hot to sleep in the daytime. I mean, they have recorded temperatures of 125 degrees at Cam Ranh Bay. You would work all night and not get off duty until daylight, and sometimes by the time you got in and cleaned your weapon [it was too hot to sleep]. You had to clean your weapon every time you came off duty. If you were in a bunker you cleaned your M-16 and your sidearm, and you also had to clean the M-60. By the time you got through doing that it was around 8:00, so you did not get back to the hooch till about 8:30, and by that time it is cooking. It is too hot. You lie down in the bunk and sleep for an hour, hour and a half, and then it is just too hot to sleep anymore. You hang around the hooch. Then at 6:00 that afternoon you have to get ready to go back to work.

So I said: "What the hell am I going to do? I am going to go one year without sleeping?" What these hooch maids would do is bring in these cigarettes with opium in them, and when you got off duty you smoked one of these opium cigarettes, and you slept.

The other thing is when you were out in the bunker, if you had a guy that you trusted the two of you could take turns sleeping, but if you did not trust the guy you had better stay awake. We had three shifts that they rotated. For instance, you would work a day shift from 8:00 in the morning to 4:00 in the afternoon, and when they rotated you would get off at 4:00 in the afternoon and had to be back at midnight to work a midnight shift. When you worked the midnight shift you got off at 7:00 in the morning and had to be back at 4:00 that afternoon. Also, after we worked an eight-hour shift we had to pull something called RSAT [Reserve Security Alert Team]. We had two tents, and it was inside the CSC compound (Central Security Control). You could take off your equipment. That is CSC right there with all the sandbags around. You could take off your equipment, but you could not take off your clothes. There were bunks in there that you could lie on, but, hell, you could not sleep.

Then we had what was called QRF – QRF means Quick Reaction Force. They had to have thirty dudes for QRF every day. You went down to the tent area, and you could not take off your pants or boots. You could take off your shirt, and you stood by down there. You laid on this bunk, and it was filthy, nasty, dirty. People had been lying on this damn bunk with their boots on, and there were no sheets. All it was was a bare mattress and a pillow, and it was filthy, nasty, dirty. If you were on a quick-turnaround day, you might work a midnight shift from 12:00 to 8:00 in the morning. Then you pulled eight hours of QRF or RSAT. Then you had to go back to work at 4:00 that afternoon and work till midnight.

L: Did you ever get any sleep?

R: No. Now, during the rainy season in the summer you had to go on patrol. If you

went out on one of the bunkers out on the perimeter, they would take you out there at 6:00 in the evening and leave you there till in the morning.

L: On patrol, patrolling the perimeter?

R: Yes. What the Vietcong [VC] would do was come up real close to the perimeter line and dig a bunker, set up a mortar, fire two or three shells into the base, and then they would get in the bunker until we finished returning fire. When the artillery lifted, then they would come out of the bunker and haul ass. They did not have far to go. There were little villages all over the place. So they [the army] came up with this idea. We had to go out and search for these fucking bunkers, and when we found a bunker we put a little red streamer on it. Then the EOD people (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) would come by and blow it up, unless they decided that they would let us fill it up with dirt.

Then sometimes for some weird reason they would want us to go down through the villages. What good we did by doing that [I do not know]. They told us we were . . . This is one of the villages; it is called My Ca. We would go into these villages, and the people would come out and want to sell us a Coca-Cola or something. What good we did going in there I do not know. We were tired, we had been working all night, we were grouchy, we were irritable. Some little kid would come up and say, "You give me cigarette," and then we would just slap the little kid up the side of his head, building hearts and mine. It was an aggravating thing.

L: How often was this base shelled or attacked?

R: What they would do was they would play with us. They were always playing with us. The thing that is different about an air force base and an army fire base [is this]: if you go out to a special forces camp or fire base, you have a little one- or two-acre area. This damn [air force] base strung out for miles. We had all these jet airplanes loaded up with bombs, full of fuel, and we had things like liquid oxygen (lox).

When the pilots are flying an airplane, they have a container of liquid oxygen under their seat. It is about the size of a volleyball. I used to watch them install it in the airplane. That gives the pilot the oxygen he breathes. We had to guard liquid oxygen storage areas. One artillery round into that damn liquid oxygen, man, and you are talking about a hellacious explosion. We also had the POL area (petroleum oils and lubricants). We had big old rubber bladders full of gasoline. We had bomb dumps. We had napalm dumps. Those guys in the army out there on those fire bases were not sitting on top of all that explosive shit.

When they built the base they left small areas of jungle. That was so the base could expand and get bigger later on. Well, when the Vietcong would come through the perimeter, they could come on the base, blow up something, and just hide on the base. The next morning at 7:00 over 5,000 Vietnamese workers came to work on that base. No pass, no I.D. system. They worked for a construction company called R.M.K. (Raymond, Morrison, and Knudsen). I did not find out until later that they were big contributors to Lyndon Johnson.

L: That figures.

R: Yes. Anyway, when they first started building the base the theory was they were going to get Korean and Thai workers, and they brought workers there from Korea and from Thailand. They hated each other. That was another pain-in-the-ass thing we had to do. We always had to go down to the R.M.K. camp and separate them. They would be out there fighting and brawling. We would stand down there with an M-16 in full combat gear, saying, "All right. You stay back over there, and you guys go over there." They were always having problems.

Now, the R.M.K. people were real nice. Whenever we went down there to quell one of their disturbances, they always let us eat in their mess hall, and they had great chow – much better than what we had. This is after you had worked all night. At 9:00 in the morning they would come down and say, "Everybody get your stuff. Go put on riot control gear. We are going to R.M.K." We would go down there with shot guns and night sticks, standing there about half dead [with fatigue].

Now, this is what really got me. When the VC would come through the damn perimeter, they did not go to the fucking aircraft. They did not go to the lox. They did not go to the bomb dump [or] the POL area. They went in there and shot up the hospital.

L: Why?

R: This is the thing about it. The Vietcong could come onto an American air base like Cam Ranh Bay, Nha Trang, or Da Nang and blow up a water tower and the chapel, and the next morning it is on the front page of *The New York Times* and on all three networks: "Big American Base Hit." Nothing in Vietnam was safe. They were hitting us for no other reason except publicity back in the United States, and we simply could not guard every damn building. We did not have enough people. Lyndon Johnson did not want to send more people over there because every time he added one man to Vietnam it made the front page of a newspaper: "Johnson Asks For More Troops To Go to Vietnam."

So we were stretched thin. We were working double shifts, we were working all

the time, we were tired, we were exhausted, we were give out. We had diarrhea. We always missed breakfast, [and] we always missed supper. The only meal we got was the noon meal, and if you slept through it you missed that. We got C-rations, but we had only one canteen of water, and there were certain C-rations out there that if you ate that stuff it had a lot of salt in it, and you got thirsty and drank up all your water. Also you are not supposed to have a canteen sloshing water – it gives you away. So it was a mess.

There were a lot of things in the C-rations. For instance, we had this ham and lima beans, white beans and ham, that we used to call "ham and mother fuckers." But somebody would murder you for your pound cake. There was a delicious pound cake in there. Turkey and noodles was good. Everybody hated beans and franks. We used to take beans and franks and shoot them – we just put them out there and pow! and beans and franks would fly everywhere.

L: They were cooking other food on a regular basis?

R: Yes. That was for the aircraft mechanics and the clerk-typists and the people back on the base.

L: C-rations are field rations.

R: Yes, that is what we ate [off base]. Today they use something called MREs (meals ready to eat).

We also rode around Jeeps with M-60 machine guns. That was hairy, too. When somebody would see something, we would go out there. I carried an M-79 grenade launcher because my eyes were real bad. I could not see good. I would go out there and shoot into the bushes with that M-79, and I loved that sucker. I really did.

L: It has a shell on it about like that?

R: Yes. It breaks down just like an old single-shot shotgun. I thought it was a neat weapon; I really did. I carried that, and I carried a revolver.

L: Did you see any combat?

R: Yes. One night we were pinned down. Do you know who was shooting at us? Koreans, ROK [Republic of Korea] marines. During the rainy season it is pouring rain. They came up with this thing called an ambush post where they would take us out and just drop us off somewhere. You had a radio, but you were not supposed to turn the stinking thing on. You just went in the bushes and sat there, and if you saw anything or heard anything, you called it in. If the VC

walked up on you, what you were supposed to do was start shooting at them. What the VC were supposed to do was turn and run away because they did not know how many of you there were. Now, I do not know whether somebody had told the VC they were supposed to do that or not. Maybe nobody briefed them.

The first couple nights I was on the ambush post I was scared to death. I really was. It was just like in the movie *Platoon*. You sit there after dark – it gets cool, it gets quiet, and you get so damn sleepy. What I used to do was take my helmet off and hold it in my hands. When I would doze off I would drop the helmet, and the helmet would hit the ground, and that would wake me up. That is how hard it was. I think it was the second or third night I was out on ambush post I said, "To hell with it." I pulled out my poncho, I wrapped myself up in my poncho, and I went my ass to sleep. I woke up the next morning – it was about 9:00 – and they had come out looking for me and could not find me [laughter].

L: They put you out there by yourself?

R: Yes, you are out there all by yourself. About this time rebellion set in. One night we got off duty, and we were all tired. Nha Trang had been shelled that night, and they said, "We want you to stand by." They loaded us up in two-and-a-half-ton trucks, drove us down to some hooches that were being constructed, and said, "You guys wait here, and we will let you know." We were all sitting around with all our M-16s, our ammo., our packs, and all this stuff, and it is 9:00, it is 10:00, it is 11:00. Finally somebody said: "Why are we doing this? It is 11:00 in the morning. All the aircraft are flying. The helicopters from Dong Ba Thin are flying. Nobody is going to attack us at no damn 11:00 in the morning. Let's go take a shower and go to bed." So we all left; 200 guys left, went back to the hooch area, and took a shower.

I had been asleep maybe an hour when they came down there and roused us out: "Get your gear and report to CSC." So we got all our gear and went down there, and they said, "Check in your weapons." OK. We went back to the armory and checked in [our weapons]. The armor had a thankless job. He would look at the weapon; he had to check it and make sure it was clean before he accepted it. He would say, "You missed a spot right there," and I would say: "Fuck you, and fuck your mama. Take the goddamn weapon or I am going to come in that cage and beat the hell out of you." I mean, it was real irritable. They had a thing called a clearing barrel which was a big old barrel, a fifty-five-gallon barrel, full of dirt, and you stuck your weapon in there, pulled the slide back, you were supposed to make sure there was no round in there, take the safety off, pull the trigger. Then you handed it to the armor. About every third guy would fire a round, POW! just to make him mad [laughter].

After we turned our weapons in they told us, "Fall in out front," so we go out in

front, and we are standing there in formation, and they make us stand there. We are standing there, and we are standing there. Finally the first sergeant comes out, and he is pissed off. He and the captain come out, this idiot captain named Graham, and they read us the *Uniform Code of Military Justice* [section] pertaining to disobeying a lawful order. They said, "All you men disobeyed a lawful order when you went back to your tents this morning." "Well, fucking put us in jail, why don't you, goddamnit." They finished reading us this *UCMJ*, and we sang him the Vietnam hymn. Have you ever heard the Vietnam hymn?

L: Yes, but . . . How does it go?

R: [Singing on one pitch] "Hymn, hymn, fuck him" [laughter]. We were real surly, and we were real rebellious. We were in a real nasty mood. What they decided we needed was to all get laid, so they started this convoy system. Every morning a convoy would leave Cam Ranh Bay going to Nha Trang or Phan Rang. What you do is you go up there, spend the night, and come back the next day. You spent the night in hotels in Nha Trang, and you could have sex – there are prostitutes all over the place – so we started doing that stuff, going back and forth.

L: Did that quell the rebellion?

R: Not really. They also started giving us three-day passes. I got one. I had just gotten off duty. It had been raining all night, and I was soaking wet. They told me to report to the orderly room. I went to the orderly room, and they gave me a three-day pass. I was not expecting it. There was me and an old buddy named Larry Terrell. He was from Mississippi, and he and I were buddies. We went back there, and we changed. At Cam Ranh Bay you were not allowed to wear civilian clothes; you had to wear a military uniform all the time. But when you went to Nha Trang you could wear civvies.

I had never seen this guy in civvies before. I had known him for about four months, and I had never seen him in civvies. I am wearing the standard Vietnam R & R uniform: white pants, sneakers, and a Hawaiian-type shirt. He is in another hooch, and I go down to his hooch. He comes out of the hooch, and he had on this cowboy suit with pearl buttons, solid black cowboy suit, and big old cowboy boots [laughter]. I said okay.

We go down to base ops. [base operations]. What you do is go down to base ops. and hang around there. You find an airplane going to Nha Trang and talk to the pilot and say, "Can I hitch a ride with you guys?" and he says, "Sure. No problem." We stayed there all morning and could not find one – not even a helicopter, as much as I hated helicopters – so he said, "Let's hitchhike." We went out and caught a ride to a bridge. We were next to a special forces camp

called Dong Ba Thin, 5th Special Forces. We are standing on the road just hitchhiking, thumb out over the road. So here comes a truckload of Korean marines, and we said, "Nha Trang. Nha Trang," and they said, "Yes, get on," so we climbed on the back of the truck. We are sitting on the floor of the truck, and these Korean marines, who are crazy anyway--they are the craziest bunch of damn people I have ever seen in my life . . . We drive maybe five or ten miles, and all of a sudden they turn off Route 1 and start going down in the rice paddies. Terrell says: "Hey, man, where are we at? Where are we at?" I am looking around, and I said: "Hey! Stop the truck!" It is the dumbest thing I ever did in my life, but Terrell and I jumped off the back of the truck, and they drove off. That is when I realized here we were in civilian clothes completely unarmed out in the middle of goddamn nowhere.

It was about a mile back to the road. We walked back to Route 1, and we started walking down Route 1. It started raining, pouring down hard. We are soaking wet, and it is getting dark.

L: Oh, oh.

R: We did not start hitchhiking until about 1:00 in the afternoon, plus we had worked all night. We had not been to bed for over twenty-four hours. Once it gets dark, Route 1 belongs to Charlie, so we were sitting here figuring what in the hell we were going to do. I said, "What we are going to have to do is just go into the jungle, hunker down, and just not move until the next morning." I was not really worried about the VC. The chances of the VC actually finding us out there were slim enough. What I was scared of was being shot by one of our own people, especially Terrell. He is wearing this black outfit.

We decided that at 6:00 [p.m.] we would start looking for a place [to stay]. We went past this little village, and everybody in the village comes out. They are standing by the road just watching us walk past. There are these guys with these little M-1 carbines. They were local security people, and it really scared me to death because I did not know if we should walk past that village. I mean, when we walked past the village we let everybody know we were there.

Down the road there was a rubber plantation owned by the Michelin rubber company. We did not want to go anywhere near that because every time we took a convoy through there we got sniper fire. So he said, "I do not want to sleep in the rubber plantation," and I said, "I do not want to sleep in the damn rubber plantation, either."

Anyway, about 5:30 here comes one of these little three-wheel Vietnamese buses full of people and chickens and whatever. We stopped that guy and gave him I do not know how much money to take us to Nha Trang. We got in this little

thing, and we were going down the road, swaying back and forth. We get to Nha Trang after curfew, after 1800 hours. The MP [military police] at Nha Trang chews our butt good. I did not care. Anyway, we got checked in to a hotel, and we just slept all night.

As far as combat was concerned, you are not in a pitch battle, but you get sniper fire and mortar rounds. I was in a defensive position. We were not like the marines where we were out there hunting for them. What you do is sit there and wait for them to mess with you. If you went out there and stayed out there all night long, and nothing happened, I mean, you did not see a bird out of place, when you got back to the hooch the next morning your nerves were just as frazzled as if you had been shooting at people all night.

For a while I worked with an NCO named Sergeant Jackson, a big, tall, good-looking black man. [He was] deeply religious [and] carried a bible with him everywhere he went. He had another black guy with him who was his junior [NCO]. We had a bunker with a .50-caliber machine gun in it, and Sgt. Jackson was in charge of that. This was on top of a hill. Running down the hill on each side are other bunkers called flanker positions. This is to keep the enemy from getting around and coming up behind the bunker.

We are overlooking a river. The Vietnamese have been fishing in this river for thousands of years. This is where they go and catch their bait fish. The villages along the coast are fishing villages. They grew rice, too, but every night they would go out and fish. We had a POL area with big gas tanks full of jet aircraft fuel. We tell the Vietnamese, "You cannot fish here anymore," because if they come in to fish there they are in mortar range of the POL area.

L: That could be a problem.

R: Well, it is a problem for them, too, because if they do not catch their bait fish they cannot go fishing at night, and they are going to starve to death. So they would come in there and fish at night anyway. They would situate themselves in the shallow places, like inside the barbed wire, and we would shoot them. When they would come inside the barbed wire we would take an M-6 machine gun and kill them, just that damn simple.

One night Sergeant Jackson called the senior man on each bunker to come up to the main bunker. I was the senior man, [so I went up there]. We went in there and sat down and lit a cigarette. One time when I went out there . . . when you go out there you have to go out before dark because there is this little friggin' snake in Vietnam called a bamboo viper. He is about this long, a little yellow son of a bitch. If he bites you you are dead.

L: Deadly poison.

R: Right. What you have to do is go out there and check your bunker and make sure there are no damn vipers in there.

L: Did you ever find any?

R: Yes, we found a ton of them. We killed a friggin' cobra one night that was 14'9" long. This cobra went from the ground, over the hood of the Jeep, and touched the ground on the other side. There were crates; we would kill twenty crates a night. What it is is an ecological thing. Here there is this big area of jungle. Snakes are living in there, [and] snakes are happy. All of a sudden here come the engineers with the damn bulldozers, and they clear away all of the habitat. Well, where in the hell do the snakes go? They go out on the perimeter, where we were. So we had damn snakes everywhere. Also we had lizards everywhere. Them damn lizards will give you a heart attack. You are out there at night, and all night long you do not know if it is a Vietcong crawling towards or if it is two lizards screwing each other. You just really did not know. Them lizards just ran us crazy.

Anyway, we would go out there early. [One night] I walked up the hill and went into the damn bunker, and Sergeant Jackson was in there, him and this other guy, with a Bible in one hand and the other hand on the barrel of a .50-caliber machine gun praying; they were on their knees praying. I said, "Oops. Excuse me," and I went back outside. He said, "Come on in, Roberts," and I went in. Sergeant Jackson was a big guy. He looked like a pro football player, and I had a lot of respect for him, which is unusual. I came from a place where black people did not get any respect. So I said, "You don't mind me asking, Sarge. What are you praying for?" He said, "Every night I pray that we do not have to shoot that machine gun." I said, "OK. I understand." Sometimes his prayers were answered, and sometimes they were not.

Anyway, that night he calls us all up there. He is a staff sergeant; he is career air force. His ass is on the line. He is about to throw his career away. He said: "I do not think we should be shooting these people when they come in here to go fishing. From now on we are not going to shoot at them anymore, and nobody is to say this to anybody outside this bunker. Unless they try to come ashore, we do not shoot." I was all for it, and all the rest of us were for it. Now, we just did not do it. We let them come in and catch their fish. There were places north of us that got shot at and places south of us that got shot at, [but] nobody ever fired at us, not one round.

L: After that.

R: Yes, after that. Well, even before then, because we were real reluctant to fire. What happened was the word of it got back, leaked out, and they called me in and Sergeant Jackson in, and he said, "Don't you realize you are violating a direct order?" "I don't give a fuck. What are you going to do to me? Are you going to send me to jail. Bye! I will go to Long Binh."

Anyway, it would not look good for them to court martial a career guy, a staff sergeant, so what they did was take Sergeant Jackson and sent him up to Da Nang. What happened to him after he got to Da Nang I do not know. They took the rest of us off bunkers, and they put us to riding around in the Jeeps, where I would be sitting in the Jeep next to a sergeant who would keep an eye on me. [laughter]

I think it was about the third or the fourth night we were out in the Jeeps when some VC had gotten through the perimeter, and we were trying to pen them out. We were on this hill, and there was a real swampy area down there. We drove up in the Jeep, and I jumped out with my M-60 and started running. The old sergeant said, "Come back here!" I came back, and he said, "Where the fuck do you think you are going?" I said, "Well, we have orders to deploy around the swamp." He said: "I got thirty-two days and a wake-up. We ain't going nowhere near that fucking swamp!" [laughter]

L: So you sat in the Jeep?

R: We sat in the Jeep [laughter]. They would call us on the radio and ask, "What is your position?" and he said, "We are about 200 yards down the swamp. We do not see anything" [laughter]. So we just sat up there in the Jeep, and I was cracking up and messing with the sergeant. I said, "Sergeant, we are never going to win the war like this," and he said: "I don't give a fuck. I am going to be home. I don't care if we win the war" [laughter].

L: When did you go home?

R: I went home after I had done my time. Now, I am going to tell you what. They cut me some slack. They let me go home three months early because I had been in Thailand. Anyway, I come home.

L: And this was when?

R: Oh, I got over there in 1967. I came home at Christmas; it was Christmastime when I got home. I got to Jacksonville, and it was raining.

L: 1968-1969?

R: 1967-1968. No, wait a minute. I got there in April 1966, and I got home in December 1966. I met my wife about a week after New Year's in 1967.

L: In Jacksonville?

R: No, in Warner Robbins [Georgia]. When you are in Vietnam they let you do something called forecast. You go down to personnel, and they ask you: "What region of the United States do you want to be stationed in? What state do you want to be stationed in? What base do you want to be stationed in?" I asked for Hunter Air Force Base in Savannah, Georgia, because I was getting short; I was getting ready to leave the military, and I wanted to be somewhere close to home so I could work out something for going to college or doing something with my wife once I got out of the service. I wound up in Warner Robbins, Georgia, at Robbins Air Force Base. I had twenty months left when I came back.

L: Tell me your wife's name.

R: Yuki. Her sister was married to a staff sergeant in the air force, and the first time I saw her was in January, right after I got there. I thought she was married. It was a misunderstanding. Her sister was married, but she was not. In April I found out she was not married, so we went out on a date. I asked her to get married on the second date, and we were married six weeks after the first date – within six months after I first met her.

L: That is pretty quick.

R: Yes. I do not care. That was twenty-six years ago, and I did not make any mistake.

When I came back from Vietnam I was a mess. I was drinking too much, my hands were shaking all the time, [and] they were about to court martial me. They claimed that I was a bad influence on the young troops. Old Terrell, the guy that I went to Nha Trang with, was also assigned to Warner Robbins, and we were both sergeants, so we got to move off base to the NCO quarters. That was a help, not having to be in the barracks with all the young troops. But what I would do was stand around and tell the young guys war stories, and they called me in one day and just told me, "Look. You are destroying morale." I said, "That is what I am planning on doing." Anyway, they just told me I had a bad attitude, and I was lucky to get out of the air force without getting court-martialed. I almost got busted a couple times after I came back from Vietnam. I had a Secret Security clearance, and they wanted to pull my security clearance because I was married to a foreigner, a non-American. So they came in and said: "You married this girl, so we are going to have to pull your security clearance. This has great ramifications for your air force career." I said, "Pull it."

L: Your wife is Japanese?

R: Yes, Japanese. I said: "Pull it. I do not give a damn about my career. I am getting out of here." So they started harassing me. They were just doing everything in the world to make my life miserable. One day they called me in and told me they were going to send me TDY to Goose Bay, Labrador. I said, "Look, I am married to a Japanese woman. She cannot drive a car, [and] she cannot speak English. This is going to create a hardship for my family." They looked at me and said, "If we wanted you to have a family we would have issued you one from supply." So I got mad.

This is 1968. Martin Luther King has been assassinated, there are riots in the street, and I am walking by a bulletin board and see this Department of Defense directive. It says, "Needed: Police Officers. You can get out of the service up to ninety days early if you go to work for a police department [or] a law enforcement agency." This was in 1968 when all the riots were going on.

L: And they needed cops.

R: They needed cops. See, I worked nine days on and got three days off. My next three-day break I got in my car, went to Florida, and got a job. I got my mama to help me. She got a state representative by the name of [Eugene F.] Gene Shaw, and he helped me get a job at the state prison.

L: This is Raiford?

R: Yes. I got out ninety days early, with a ninety-days adjusted discharge date. That made me too short to go to Labrador. So they are pissed at me now. They are very, very mad. They come in there and say: "You cannot do this. You cannot do this." I say, "I just did it." They called the commanding officer at personnel, and there was no way they could stop me from getting out ninety days early, and I got out ninety days early.

They harassed me even after I got home. See, just before you go home you are supposed to come in and prove to them that you have all your uniforms, what you were issued at basic training. Well, hell, I did not have anything. I had been moving around Thailand [and] Vietnam, and coming back I had lost all my junk. They give you this dress uniform that you wear about three times the whole time you are in the air force. You never wear it when you are traveling. You wear your khakis because they are more comfortable. What I did was I went and got Terrell's. I went in the barracks and borrowed everybody's [uniforms so I could pass their little test].

L: So you move to Raiford. Where are you living?

R: I come home, and I get a job at Florida State Prison. I worked the East Unit. After the riots they divided the prison in half and named one Union Correctional Institution and the other one Florida State Prison, which creates a paper situation that does not exist in reality. In reality it is all just one big prison, but if you slice it up and give each one a different name, then they can say, "None of our prisons is too large."

Anyway, when I got to Raiford there were 3,000 inmates – there were 1,000 in the East Unit.

L: Are they dividing them as to crime: federal criminals?

R: No. The East Unit was a prison for troublemakers. Somebody asked, "How can you tell a troublemaking inmate?" If he is in the East Unit, he is trouble. When he gets off the transfer bus, he has been trouble to somebody or he would not be there.

I was put in charge of K wing. The prison is laid out like a Christmas tree. There is a main hallway, and there are branches coming off to the side. K wing is on the east side. I had all the drag queens, child molesters, rapists, and the aggressive homosexuals. Right across the hall in V wing were their "husbands." These are the muscle guys, the guys who pump iron ten hours a day and look like Arnold Schwarzenegger. I had one guy who spent two nights in the women's section in Hernando County jail before they found out. I had the damnedest collection of freaks you have ever seen in your life. I had a Jewish guy named Fred Allen Frieslander who shot his stepdaddy five times but did not kill him. It was a fun job. Sometimes it was funny; sometimes it was dead serious.

I saw more people actually get killed inside that prison than I did in Vietnam.

L: Were these prisoners killing each other?

R: Yes – stabbings. One time it was real hot, and I had an inmate named Frenchy DiMotti. He comes down and says, "Mr. Roberts, I am painting a picture in my cell. You have the big ceiling fans going on in the cellhouse, and they are sucking dust through the window. Could you cut them off?" I said okay, so I went in there and flipped the big old fans off. A few minutes later Willard Winchester comes down, and he says . . .

L: These prisoners are free to move around?

R: Yes. This is what is known as a population wing. I had ninety-seven men on a wing. They lived there, they went to work (they all had jobs), they all went down

to the chow hall to eat, the mess hall. Now, on the other end of the hall is where the ones were locked up all the time. I had about ten guys on the wing who worked there on the wing; they were called housemen. Then there was a detail out in the hall that mopped the hall; they were called the "thirteenth spot."

The jobs at Raiford are given numbers. There is eight-spot, nine-spot, eleven-spot, twelve-spot, whatever. The even-numbered ones are white, and the odd-numbered ones are black. For instance, let us say you had a squad of men that went out under a gun, that worked under a gun. The black squads would have white trustees, and the white squads would have black trustees.

L: They had the prisoners segregated?

R: Yes. Right. Part of the prison was segregated, and part of it was integrated. We had two wings that were all black, we had two wings that were all white, and then the others were integrated to various degrees.

L: Was this a leftover Jim Crow law, or was this just to keep the peace?

R: A little bit of both; it was a little bit of both. Now, over at the main prison there were three-man cells and ten-man cells, and all the cells were segregated – not the wings or the floors, but the cells themselves were segregated. In the East Unit every inmate had his own individual cell. That is because of the homosexual problem. K wing was integrated except for the aggressive homosexuals. These guys were the drag queens. These are the guys who dress up like women and stuff, and they are all there. It was a weird situation.

Anyway, getting back to Willard, he comes down to my station and tells me he is hot, and he asks me to turn the fans on. I said: "Look. I am not going to turn the fans off and on. You go up and talk to Frenchy, and y'all decide what you want to do." So he goes up to talk to Frenchy. I am not paying any attention to what is going on, and all of a sudden an inmate comes running down the hall and says, "Mr. Roberts! Mr. Roberts! Go upstairs!" I went upstairs, and Frenchy DiMotti has stabbed Willard twice in the belly with a knife, and he is standing there bleeding like a stuck hog, and his guts are hanging out. I got chewed out for that, and I got chewed out rightly. The lieutenant told me: "Look. You are young; you are inexperienced. You do not understand that Raiford is like a big magnifying glass. Things that are minor problems in the free world [are big problems] in here. People are killed in here for a pack of cigarettes, a bag of cookies, a cup of coffee. Things that in the free world are totally unimportant in here become very, very, very, very important, and people are killed because of it." I did not know, but I learned fast.

L: How long had you been on the job?

R: Oh, I do not know. Six months or so, I suppose.

L: When does the riot occur?

R: The riot occurred in February of 1971. We had some inmates in the East Unit who were very, very intelligent. We had Joseph A. Peel, Jr. Joseph A. Peel, Jr., was a judge. He had been a judge in West Palm Beach, and he had hired two other men to kill another judge and his wife, Judge and Mrs. C. E. Chillingworth. He got a life sentence for that. It was a contract slaying. I had Dr. Carl Coppalino, an anesthesiologist. He was in there for murdering his wife. F. Lee Bailey was his attorney. I had a guy named Al Hill who had spent a lot of time in maximum security, and he had written a Latin dictionary to keep from going crazy.

Shortly after I got there they started altering college classes in the prison at night, 6:00-9:00. I went to see Mr. Bell, who was the principal of the school, and I asked him if I could take college classes with the inmates. He said yes. So every afternoon at 6:00 I went over to "the Rock," and I went to the west gate. The Rock was the main prison, the one across the river. I would check out the inmates going to school. I would take them to the school, they would break up, go to their classes, and I would sit in a class and take the class.

L: They had the classes inside the main prison.

R: Inside the main prison [school].

L: Is this an extension of St. Johns Community College?

R: No, Lake City Community College. At that time it was called Lake City Junior College. So my first two years of college I got inside the Florida State Prison. They also had classes over in the East Unit, down in the school over there, but I did not take any classes in the East Unit simply because I did not want to sit in a classroom with these guys and then the next day have to supervise them, so I went to the main prison.

The strike . . . It was not a riot; it was a strike, and these real sharp guys were in charge of it. It started in the East Unit. What they would do is nobody would eat, and nobody would go to work. Everybody would stay in their cells.

L: And this doctor and this judge had organized all the other prisoners?

R: Well, I do not know who organized what. They were under the impression that I had organized it. See, the prison runs on the snitch system. If an inmate goes

to the captain and says, "Captain, there is a little boy over in T wing . . ." He does not come in there and say, "There is a young boy, and I would like to have sex with him." What he says is, "There is a young boy over on T wing, and the niggers are trying to screw him. If you would move him over there and put him in the cell next to mine, I would protect him." Now, he has no more interest in protecting this kid than the man in the mood.

L: Right.

R: Right. So the captain would not say, "Yes, I will do that." He would say, "Bring me some information." He says, "I want some information, and if I do not get any information, that kid is going to stay where he is at, and you are going to stay where you are at." So what this guy would do would be to look around, and he sees somebody with a homemade knife or a hypodermic needle or a hacksaw blade, and he writes a letter to the captain and rats the guy out. Once he has ratted the guy out, they bring his little "girlfriend" over there and put him in the cell next to him. That is the way the prison works. [It is a] dirty, rotten system, but that is the way it works.

Their snitches and informants in the prison had told them that this plot had been hatched down in the school. Now, the school that it was hatched at was the East Unit school, and I was over at the main prison school. That is all right. Somehow or another they got the idea that I was involved in it.

L: But you were not.

R: No. When that strike happened I was as shocked as the next guy, and I have no reason to lie. I have not worked in the prison in years. Anyway, Thursday and Friday were my days off, and the strike happened on a Thursday.

L: Which is more circumstantial evidence against you.

R: Yes, really. Now, Thursday night they got it resolved. The inmates had a list of demands, and they were reasonable demands. They wanted to buy black cosmetics. What else did they want? They wanted someplace in their cell where they could lock up their stuff. Somebody could come into their cell and steal all their personal items – their toilet articles, candy bars, and stuff like that. They wanted to be paid for their work, but they told them: "Look. We cannot do that for you because the legislature would have to appropriate money to pay you." Whatever it was. Anyway, they settled it Thursday night or Friday morning at the main prison. It was all over while I was still off.

But what happened was the strike spread from the East Unit over to the main prison, and in the main prison it was not as well organized, and it was not as well

disciplined. It was a sporadic thing. When the men came back from work that afternoon, instead of sending them to their cells and locking them in their cell, which is standard procedure whenever there is a disturbance in a prison, they ran them all out onto the yard, where they are all out there in a big mob. That is dumb. So they are all out there on the baseball field, and then they march out there with a bunch of shotguns, like a firing squad, and open up and shoot the guys. Yes.

L: Who marches out there?

R: The guards, with twelve-gauge shotguns.

L: How many people did they shoot?

R: Oh, it is hard to say. There were about thirty-five or forty guys who reported for medical treatment, but a lot of guys did not go to medical treatment. They were shot with bird shot from shotguns.

L: Nobody was killed?

R: One guy lost an eyeball, but nobody was killed that night, and it is a damn miracle they did not. The next day, Saturday, I come to work, and it was right after the shooting at the Rock. I worked Saturday, I worked Sunday, and it was hairy. Monday I worked, and Tuesday is when they had the show of force. I think Monday they had the shooting at the hospital. They went in there and shot a bunch of prisoners in the damn hospital or something. I do not know what it was.

So the prison system decided that this thing had gone on long enough. I personally think they encouraged it. They had Florida State Prison guards, they had Florida Highway Patrol and Florida Marine Patrol in about equal numbers. They decided that what they would do was have a show of force. That morning the inmates got up and went to work. They came back after the morning shift, ate lunch, and went back to the wing. That way they could brush their teeth. Then at 1:00 we called them out and sent them back to work that afternoon. Then at 5:00 they came back in. So at 1:00 the whistle is supposed to blow. I stand there in the door of the cellhouse, and I call out the squads: "Garment factory. Tobacco factory. Thirteenth-spot. School. Inside fence. Outside fence." These are the names of the work details. So I am standing there, and the whistle does not blow. Five minutes pass. Ten minutes pass. Fifteen minutes pass. I have no idea what is going on.

L: They did not include you?

R: No. I do not know what everybody else was told. They did not tell me anything. So the phone rings, and I go in there. To get to the phone I have to walk through the inmates. I answer the telephone, and on the other end of the telephone there is Sergeant [Carl] Sterns.

I had an inmate by the name of Randy Vile, an old-time convict who had been in prison forever. I think he had been twenty-five years in prison. Before I answered the telephone he comes up to me and says: "Mr. Roberts, I just looked out the window, and they have every cop in Florida out there in the parking lot. What is going on?" I said, "I do not know what is going on." Old Randy says, "Well, I know what is going on." All of a sudden the inmates pull out a roll of toilet paper and start putting toilet paper in their nose and in their mouth and in their ears.

L: Gas?

R: No. If you have toilet paper in there it keeps you from keeping your nose broke. I said: "You guys are crazy! They are not going to come in here and just start beating the hell out of y'all. You have not done anything wrong." Old Randy looked at me and said, "Mr. Roberts, you ain't been here as long as I have." I said, "I can't believe this shit." The inmates [were absolutely silent]; it was quiet enough you could hear a pin drop in there. They were not making a sound. The phone rings. I walk through the inmates and pick up the phone. Sergeant Sterns says, "When you see the riot squad start coming down the hall, go outside and lock your main door." We called it the king door. I hung up that phone, and my hand was shaking like a wet bird dog in a snowstorm. I am trying to be cool here, now. I start moving toward the door, and an old boy whose last name was Joyner (I forget if his first name was Bob or Robert) steps in front of me and says, "Where are you going?" I said: "Wherever I want to. Get out of the damn way." If it had been anybody else except him I would have been scared, but this guy was a jerk. He just was not somebody to be afraid of. I walk out in the hall, and I am standing there, and all the inmates are saying, "What is going on?" "Shut up and get back inside!"

All of a sudden I see the grill gate open, and I walk over there and slam the door and lock it. Then pandemonium breaks out in the wing.

L: They had sent a riot squad in there?

R: Yes, 100 men.

L: And how many prisoners are in there?

R: There are 1,000 prisoners, but they are segregated 100 men to a wing.

L: So a 100-man riot squad goes in to handle 100 prisoners.

R: Yes. But the riot squad has twelve-gauge shotguns, tear gas, billy clubs--they have all that good stuff.

Now, I am going to make a long story short. I am going to tell you they started on J wing, went to W wing, K wing, L wing, back and forth across that hall. They took all the inmates out and forced them down onto the bottom floor. They all went down to the bottom floor, and they backed them up against the wall. They had three rows of Florida Marine Patrol dudes with billy clubs standing right in front of them, and around the railing all of the prison guards were like that with a twelve-gauge shotgun pointing at them.

In comes Mr. [Robert] Turner – Mr. Turner is assistant superintendent – and he rants and raves. "This bullshit's over with. You people are going to go back to work, and you are going to do what in the hell we say. Do you understand?" And then he would look up at Captain Combs, who was up on the second floor. "Captain Combs, do you see anybody don't understand?" and he said: "Yeah. That man there. He don't understand. He doesn't understand. He doesn't understand." They pulled them out of the crowd and beat the shit out of them.

L: In front of all the others?

R: Yes. Billy clubs, night sticks, rifle barrels in the stomach. They ran them up the stairwell up onto the quarter deck – they really got a good whipping up there on that quarter deck. That quarter deck is like a stage up there. Everybody can see that quarter deck. Then they went out into the hall, and down the hall they ran, and every time they would pass a correctional officer, the guy would get two or three licks into him. By the time the guy got down to the end of the hallway, he was a bloody mess. They brought him on and locked him up in one of the segregation wings down there, putting two or three men to a cell. They are designed for only one person.

During the strike, during all this ass kicking, I went over and told Captain Combs I did not think it was necessary. That is all I said; I said, "I do not think this is necessary." He said, "You shut up and let us do this." I said, "Okay. Suit yourself." So when it is all over, they take the guards up there and give us a "keep your mouth shut; do not tell nobody about this" briefing. They said: "What happens in here is our business. It is nobody else's business but ours. We do not want anybody to know about it."

That night I went home and called a friend of mine who worked at the community college, and I said, "I got to talk to you." He came over, and I am telling him

what happened. Another guard who was not there that day – he had taken an inmate to the hospital in Gainesville – came by, and he said, "I will just talk to two people from the governor's office and tell them what happened today." I said okay. About midnight I go to bed.

The next morning I go to work. They did not call my name at roll call. I went up there and said, "Y'all did not call my name." They said, "Captain wants to see you." I said okay. So I sit there for two or three hours in the captain's office waiting on him. The captain comes in and the assistant superintendent, and they say, "Step in here." I go in there, and they say, "We understand you made a press release last night." I said: "No. Not me." What had happened [is] the *St. Petersburg Times*, Martin Dyckman of the *St. Pete Times*, had printed everything that had happened in the East Unit that day, and they totally panicked. They figured that I was the one who told. It was not me; it was this other guy, Donald Neats, who was not even in the East Unit that day. Because he was gone to Shands [Teaching Hospital in Gainesville] taking a prisoner to the hospital, they figured it could not be him. They wanted me to tell them. They said, "It was you," and I said, "No, it was not me." They sit there for at least three hours, and they called me everything except a child of God. They browbeat me every way in the world. I know what a POW feels like when he is being interrogated. I would stand up in front of the desk, and they would walk behind me and stand behind me and talk. I asked them if I could sit down, and they said: "No. You stand up." They came around, and they came right in my face. "Who made that press release?" I said it was not me. I knew who did it, but I was not going to tell them. So they said, "We want your resignation." I said, "You ain't going to get it." Anyway, they said, "Go outside for a while."

What I think happened was they had decided that they had screwed up, that it was not me that told. So they called me in there and said, "Do you know who told?" I said no. He said, "It was not you?" I said, "No, it was not me." So he said, "Go back outside for a minute," and they all had a big meeting in there. They came back and said, "We are transferring you to the O Unit." That is the trustee area. "You report to Captain Edwards over there at the trustee unit. We are going to call for a supervisor's evaluation of you." That is the kiss of death. See, once a year you get an evaluation from your supervisor [of] how good you are doing. When they call for a special one, that means you have done something wrong. So they give you a bad evaluation, and they give you ninety days to correct your problem. At the end of ninety days, [if] you have not corrected your problem you are out the door. I knew how that worked.

L: Had you planned on this as a career up to this point?

R: No. Definitely not [laughter]. I wanted to go to college. What I was trying to do was work there two years and finish my junior college and then go to the

University of Florida. I was saving money; I was putting money away. But this is in February, and I do not graduate from junior college until July, so I had to make eight months [until classes started at UF]. I offered them a deal. I said, "You all let me work here until next September, and I will leave voluntarily." They said: "No, we cannot do that. We want you gone now." Once they said they were going to call for an evaluation, I knew it was all over. So I worked the rest of the day at the O Unit.

That night I got in touch with an attorney, Carol Scott in Gainesville, who was representing the ACLU. She came by my house and said, "Did you see what happened in the East Unit?" I said yes. She said, "Are you willing to testify?" I said yes. I decided that the best thing for me to do was not stay where I was. I was living very close to the prison. Yuki and I packed up a bag, and we first went to Lake City. We stayed at this Lake City Junior College professor's house. I left there and went to Gainesville. Finally I went to Jacksonville to a lawyer's. I was going from one lawyer's house to another.

I was with an attorney named Lyman Fletcher up in Jacksonville, and he comes in and says, "There is a film crew from Channel 4 [in Jacksonville]. They want to come by and film you with the agreement that they will not release anything without your permission." They come in there and film an interview, the longest interview they have ever broadcast [or so I was told].

After I gave them that interview, what happened was the suit was in a stalemate. Carol Scott, the attorney that I contacted, was shot in her home in Gainesville. Come to find out, it was her boyfriend that did it. Anyway, I did not know that; I did not know who shot her.

L: You figured the worst.

R: Yes, I figured the worst. So the guy from Channel 4 called me and said: "Look. The judge in Jacksonville is about to throw the suit out of court. The only way we can stop that from happening . . ." Also I had been calling in sick. I had been out of work for five days, and I had been calling the prison every morning reporting that I was too sick to come to work. I could not keep doing that. So he said, "Let us show the film." I knew just as soon as I stepped through the gate of that prison they were going to fire me. Then anything I said was sour grapes because I had been fired. So I said, "OK. Show it on TV that night, Wednesday night, and I will go back to work the next morning." It was Tuesday night, and I went back to work Wednesday, and then Thursday and Friday were my days off. So I would only have to work one day, and then I got two days off.

They showed that thing Tuesday night, and the inmates saw the 6:00 broadcast, and the whole prison broke out in goddamn pandemonium. They ordered a

lockdown; [they] put everyone in their cells and told them to keep the TVs cut off for the next three days. A prisoner told me that. I did not know; I was not there.

Anyway, I go to work that next morning. I showed up at 7:00 in the morning. Captain Edwards meets me at the gate of the O Unit, and he says, "Major MacKenzie wants to see you." No shit. [laughter] So I get in my car and go over there to the front gate. When I walked up the guy who worked on the front gate was a Sergeant Johns. When he saw me coming I thought he was going to die. I mean, he turned white as a sheet. He said, "Can I help you, M-M-M-Mr. Roberts?" I said: "Yes. I am supposed to see Major MacKenzie." He said: "OK. I am going to call." So he calls the major's office, and he says, "Have a seat over there, and they will get in touch with you."

It is very unusual. What had happened is the gate had been cut on me. Guards usually can just come and go as they please. I was in a uniform; I was wearing a uniform, and I could not go through the gate. So I am just sitting down in a chair. I said: "This is going to be another one of those waiting games. They are going to make me wait here for about three hours to build anxiety." Captain Johns came in. Now, Captain Johns and my father were in the boleta business together. [laughter]

L: Is this Johns related to Charley Johns?

R: Yes. He is his nephew. He was a captain. He is the only person who got fired out of this whole deal. What he did was he had gone into the flattop, which is the disciplinary unit in the main prison, and conducted a kangaroo court. A kangaroo court is when you bring an inmate out and sit him, and you say, "How many bubbles in a bar of soap?" "I don't know." "Wrong answer." Slap him out of the chair. He is in handcuffs. He would get fired for that, but they would hire him back. He wound up working at the food stamp office in Gainesville. Now, hear this. When my stepfather was arrested in Jacksonville with marijuana, guess who was with him? [laughter]

L: Charley Johns's nephew.

R: Yes, Kenneth Johns, the captain at the prison, the one who was kicking all the convicts asses. I swore if he goes to jail I am going to hire a truck with a loudspeaker system and stand out there outside the prison and tell the prisoners who he is so they can have their way with him when he gets in there. Anyway, Captain Johns comes in and looks at me and says, "Don't you work at the O Unit?" I said yes. He says, "Well, then why don't you get your goddamn ass back to the O Unit." About that time the other guy (the sergeant was named Johns too) says, "Major MacKenzie wants to see him," so he said okay. That is when it dawned on me: they are not going to fire me. They are not going to fire

me.

L: Why not?

R: This is the kicker. I did not know until later on. Anyway, they said, "Go to the major's office," so I walked in the major's office, and here comes Major MacKenzie, the same dude who put me through hell the week before. He comes in and shakes my hand and says: "Hi, Mr. Roberts. How are you doing?" I said fine. He sits down at the desk and says, "How do you like your new job at the O Unit?" I said fine. He says, "How do you like your days off?" My days off were Friday and Saturday. Now, look. You have to work at that prison twenty years to get Friday and Saturday off.

L: How did you get them early?

R: Apparently I left the East Unit, and they sent me to the O Unit and put me on day shift and gave me Friday and Saturday off. I think they were trying to say, "You keep your mouth shut, and we will forget about this – if we feel like it." It was a carrot-and-stick thing. They had the carrot, which was the Friday and Saturday off working day shift, and the stick thing was this evaluation they were calling for. So he says, "Do you like your job?" I say yes. He says, "Do you like everything you are doing?" I say yes. He says, "Is there anything else I can do for you? Any way I can help an officer out I will be glad to help him out." I said, "No, I am fine." He says, "Well, that is all I wanted to ask you [was] how you were doing."

Just as I was getting ready to walk out the door he says, "Somebody told me you were on TV last night." I said yes. He says, "Somebody told me that you said that I beat an inmate with a tear gas gun. Did you say that?" I said, "Yes, I said that." He says, "I never hit no-damn-body." I took my hat off, and I had my federal subpoena in there, and I said, "I am under a federal subpoena to go to court, and I do not think we ought to be talking about this." He said: "Well, that is not why I called you over here. I just wanted to call you over here to ask you if you like your job and if there is anything I can do to help you out." I said: "OK. Thank you." I put the thing back in my hat and walked out.

I swear, Stuart, I could not feel my feet touching the floor. It was like walking on air. I could not feel my feet touching the floor, and I said, "Holy mackerel, Jack." This is not what I expected. I expected him to call me in and fire me. I was ready for that. I was not ready for the fact that I was going to have to keep on working there.

The next day I had to go to court, and I testified in court. I was on the witness stand for six and a half hours – all morning and all afternoon.

L: This is your day off.

R: This is my day off. All the other witnesses, as soon as they were through testifying, were excused. Me, I had to stay there. I sat outside that hallway in the federal court building up in Jacksonville.

Now, there is another thing that happened, too. The sheriff in Union County came by to see my mother. My older brother, Bill, was principal at Greenville High School in Madison County at that time, and he called my brother and said: "Bill, you need to come down here. I need to talk to you." So my brother went down to the sheriff's office, and he said: "Look. This is why I was missing. This is why I was livid. Eddie has disappeared, and the people out there at the prison believe he is about to do something very stupid. If he does, they have about six inmates who are ready to stand up and testify that he is a homosexual and they have had homosexual relations with him, and it will ruin him forever."

Anyway, after the thing had been on TV, I came home. The film is in the can now, and I came home. Bill comes over to my house and tells me what the sheriff had told him. I said: "Fuck him. They are bluffing. They are bluffing. They ain't never screwed nobody out there at that damn [prison]." There is no privacy in that prison. There is nowhere in that prison you can do that, especially with my job. I was always standing there with a clipboard, and there were always twenty people hanging around me. So I said, "They are bluffing, Bill." He said, "Well, maybe they are not bluffing." I said: "They are bluffing. Don't worry about it." It really pissed me off that the sheriff would get involved in that.

Anyway, when it was all over, Bill came to me and said: "You were right. They were bluffing." See, I knew these guys. I continued to work in that prison from February till September.

L: You finished your college, right?

R: Yes. I graduated in July, and I left in September to go enroll at the University of Florida.

L: So this is September of 1971.

R: Yes. The riot was in February. I graduated [from Lake City Junior College] in July of 1971.

Mr. Turner resigned; Captain Johns was fired; [D. R.] Hassfurder, the superintendent, was demoted four pay grades and transferred; and the other guards were suspended for thirty days without pay. After they came back from their suspension, guess where they put them to work? In the O Unit with me.

[laughter]

L: Oh, oh.

R: Anyway, believe it or not, we all kind of got to be friends before the whole thing was over because we all felt that we had been shit on by the system. The guards felt like they had been sold down the river, and I had my complaints, so that was that.

L: So you graduate and continue working there, and then . . .

R: I worked there until September, and I resigned in September to enroll in the fall quarter at the University of Florida. I moved to Gainesville.

L: And you moved to Gainesville?

R: Hell, yes. I was ready to kiss Lake Butler goodbye.

L: What was Gainesville like at that point?

R: Hippie, antiwar, a lot of activism. There was Dub's Steer Room out there. Did anybody ever tell you about Dub's Steer Room? His was the first topless joint in Gainesville.

L: Dub's Steer Room?

R: Go up 13th Street. Just before you get to the Rancher there is a place on the left. I do not know what it is now, but it used to be Dub's Steer Room. Why it is called Dub's Steer Room I do not know, but it was a swinging night spot. There was Dub's, there was Sin City Lounge on South 13th Street, there was a student at the University of Florida who had posed naked in a magazine and got \$10,000.

L: Yes, Pam Brewer.

R: Yes, and she opened the Subterranean Circus. Do you know where that war surplus place, M & C?

L: On University [Avenue]?

R: Yes, right next to that big red building. That is where her place used to be.

L: Was it a hippie bar?

R: Well, it was a head shop – your psychedelic posters, black lights, and all that sort of thing. And I fucking loved it. I could not wait to let my hair grow long and grow a beard and start being me for a while. I had spent four years in the air force and had spent three years at that prison, [and] I was sick of it. That is when I ran into Scott.

L: [Scott] Camil.

R: Yes. He hung around on the Plaza [of the Americas] all the time, and they had the Vietnam Veterans Against the War [VVAW], and I joined.

L: Now, when did you join Vietnam Veterans Against the War?

R: Some time in the fall quarter of 1971. I could not tell you the real date. It was some time that first quarter I was there.

L: What are your earliest memories [of their activities]? What did this group do?

R: The first demonstration I ever went to was that fall quarter of 1971. They had a vigil on Thanksgiving Day in front of Tigert Hall.

L: What did you do?

R: [We] just stood around. In fact, I went by there and hung around for a couple or three hours, and then I left because I had to go eat Thanksgiving dinner with somebody.

My frame of mind at this time was that I had done my duty. I had spent four years in the military, I had been to Vietnam and Thailand, and I had been in a Raiford prison riot. I needed rest. I really was not in any mood to go out and man the barricades and duke it out with the cops.

L: You told me earlier, if I remember correctly, [that you] were very serious about getting a degree and getting out quickly.

R: Right. I had to get out of college before my money ran out.

L: This is government money?

R: Yes, G.I. Bill, plus money I had saved when I was working at Raiford. So I was taking a heavy classload, and I was working hard. But I ran into Scott, and I participated in a couple more demonstrations. There was one down at the Reitz Union one night where they had the military ball, and we showed up and protested that. There was always a table out there in front of the west library,

and we handed out literature. I wore my button.

L: Are you socializing with these folks and hanging out with them?

R: No, I am not really hanging out with them because I did not have time. I was going to college.

L: This is where Camil was renting?

R: Yes. Scott lived in several places. Do you know where the University post office is?

L: In the [student] ghetto?

R: Yes. Right across the street he used to have an apartment. He used to live out on Archer Road for a while, and the VVAW rented this big, old, two-story house that is today a parking lot on West University Avenue. They had a big banner out there that said, "Vietnam Veterans Against the War," and they all lived in there.

L: How big of a group is this?

R: I never did figure that out. I think it might have been 100 guys or so. I do not know how many were like me who just came around every now and then. But I think they had about 100 hard-core members. We marched in the homecoming parade; I remember that.

L: Is this with the theatrics?

R: Yes. We went out and bought little toy M-16 guns, and we had one guy dressed up. There was a Vietnamese girl there on campus, and she wore black pajamas, and she had the hat, and we always treated her like the VC prisoner, and we did guerrilla theater. There was another march where we went down to the courthouse, and Scott made one hell of a good speech that night. But I do not know exactly when that was.

We were not the only organization on campus. There was the Student Mobilization Committee, there was Students for a Democratic Society, there was a group of Quakers there, there were the [George] McGovern people. McGovern was running against Nixon for president then.

I am going to tell you what. To me the whole thing was like mental relaxation. It did me good psychologically to be in that environment. I had been in a rigid military, semi-military environment for seven years, and I felt like I had been in

jail and had now been turned loose.

L: What were you studying?

R: Sociology. I was in the Department of Sociology. I graduated from the sociology department in 1973.

L: With a B.A.

R: With a B.A., and could not find a job looking under rocks. I finally wound up working for a finance company, Aetna Financial Corporation.

L: Here in Gainesville?

R: Yes. Good! I chased deadbeats [and] got them to pay their bills. I was good at that. I was good. I won a twelve-gauge shotgun, a steam-dry iron, . . . I was just real good at it. I would go out to these people's houses, and they would say, "I want to beat the hell out of you." I would say: "Well, after you finish whipping me you still are going to owe this money. Now, are you going to quit being an idiot and let's sit down and talk about this?" I would go in and sit down at the dinner table, and we would sit down there and work it out. I said: "Look. You owe this money. You gotta pay it. Let's sit down and let me see what I can do for you." All of a sudden, instead of becoming a boogeyman I became a nice guy, and, hell, they would invite me for dinner, fix me a cup of coffee, and I would come back later on and they were glad to see me. Buddy, I had some collections. I mean, the manager told me, "You are the best I have ever seen in doing this."

L: Why did you not stick with this?

R: Because it pays shit. Also, they had this thing they called Chinese overtime. Every Wednesday you had to work until 9:00 at night. This is because you had to go around to people's houses. See, you got there at 8:00 in the morning and made loans all day, and then after 6:00 is when you went out and started doing your collecting, after people got home from work. I did not want to do that, so I went to work for an insurance company called Cotton States Life – Bries, McCray & Associates. I went to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, for training. God, I would rather die than be an insurance salesman.

L: Now, if we can back up a minute, do you remember the big riots in 1972?

R: Yes.

L: Where were you when those happened?

R: In 1972 Nixon mined Haiphong Harbor. I had just gotten out of class when somebody told me that something was happening over at Tigert Hall. I went around the front of Tigert Hall, and there were about 200 people. You know those concrete benches they have on campus?

L: Yes.

R: They had taken those out and had blocked [U.S. Highway] 441 [13th Street]. This was spontaneous. As the day wore on the crowd got larger and larger and larger. Finally they called the . . . I remember now. I had a class in Norman Hall.

L: The education building.

R: Yes, and I was going to Norman Hall when I saw all this. I said, "What is going on?" They said, "Nixon mined Haiphong Harbor." I stood up there on the steps of Tigert Hall and watched it. I watched the tear gas. Vietnam Veterans Against the War did not have anything to do with that, not that I could see.

L: Did you sit in the street or do anything?

R: No, I did not go out there in the street. I think what it was [was] my wife was working at Maas Brothers, and I had to go pick her up, and if I got arrested and put in jail there was nobody to go pick up my wife. It is just that simple. A little thing like that is what protest hinges on. So after I picked up my wife I went back out there, and I had to do some work at the library.

What it was [is] they would block the road in front of Tigert Hall. The cops would come down and clear the road. They [the students] would go through campus and block University Avenue. So they were going back and forth, back and forth, across campus. Tear gas was every-goddamn-where. This is the only time I have ever seen that Krystal closed; that is the only time in my life I have ever seen that Krystal closed.

I am up there in the library – you know how they have those big old windows – and I am watching this stuff out the window of the library. You could not get one more person in that Krystal.

L: Why were they in there?

R: See, what happened is the cop would come in, throw a bunch of tear gas, and everybody would disperse, and then they would run around arresting people. So what you do is run in the library – research! or you say: "I am getting a hamburger at Krystal. Do you mind?" So they closed the Krystal and they closed the library. God, the tear gas was all over the campus, and it was total

pandemonium. It was almost like the L.A. riots [this past summer in the wake of the beating of Rodney King]. It was a spontaneous thing, and nobody was really in charge.

L: This was the first night.

R: Yes, this was the first night. What happened after that I do not really remember. I do remember one thing. There was a boy who used to be deputy sheriff over in Lake Butler named Carl Fuller Miles, and he and a bunch of other Gainesville deputies were running around campus wearing bib overalls, brogan shoes, with black jacks in their back pockets – doing what I do not know. A picture of them appeared in *The Gainesville Sun*. Well, no. It was an *Alligator*, not *The Gainesville Sun*. [Professor of religion and history] Mike Gannon, who was still a priest at that time, said, "Does anybody recognize these people?" and I called him and told him: "I know one of them. His name is Fuller Miles, and I know he works for the Alachua County sheriff's department."

There was another big thing: the highway patrolmen taped over the numbers of their patrol cars, and there was no way of identifying them, and they were wearing these riot helmets. One of them grabbed somebody and half killed him, and there was no way to tell which cop did it. So there was a big thing about that, too.

L: Were you aware of any quasi-military-type action on the part of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, things involving sling shots and balloons filled with ammonia and things like that?

R: No. I was not involved in that. In 1973 I graduated. See, this is one of the things that has bothered my conscience, that I did not do enough back then. But my wife was insistent about this: "Look. You cannot spend your whole life just causing trouble." I knew that one day I was going to graduate from the University of Florida, and I was going to have to go find a job, and I did not want any more on my résumé of being a troublemaker than already. So I helped Scott and them out [only to a point].

Also, it was obvious to me that the organization was heavily infiltrated. There were guys in there that just had "deputy sheriff" written all over them.

L: How could you tell and they could not?

R: Because I had worked at the Florida State Prison, and I knew what pig cops look like. I could tell by the way they walk, their mannerisms, what they were interested in. I could just spot these guys ten miles off. I said, "These guys are undercover agents."

L: Did you voice any of these concerns to the rest of them?

R: Well, yes, I told Scott. I said, "Scott, you need to be careful." Scott did not half trust me, either, at that time because, hell, I had all the characteristics.

L: You were an ex-cop.

R: Yes, I am an ex-cop, I am a prison guard, I am a redneck, I had a white sidewall haircut.

Now, at the same time I could not believe, I really could not believe, that the FBI and whoever would go to that much trouble to infiltrate us, because I did not think we were doing that much to harm the war. I really did not. Other groups like SDS [Students for Democratic Society] and the Weathermen and other groups on campus were a lot more active than we were, really.

L: SDS was . . . ?

R: Students for Democratic Society, Tom Hayden's organization.

L: On the UF campus?

R: Yes. Then there was a Mobilization Committee Against the War.

L: Do you remember anything specific about these Gainesville groups – SDS and others?

R: I did not have anything to do with them. I knew some of the leaders. One of their leaders was a woman who worked over at Norman Hall. I did not know too much about them. I did not associate with them too much. But whenever they would have something on the Plaza [of the Americas] I would go down there and watch.

L: OK. Do you remember any black militants, any Black Student Union people?

R: Yes. Joe Waller, I think his name was, was the on-campus black radical at that time. There were six guys going to college with me who were former prisoners at Raiford. One was a guy named John Ricardo who was a photographer, there was a guy named Arthur Adams who was a former death-row inmate (he went to death row when he was sixteen), and there was a guy named Ronald Harshman who was in the philosophy department. Then there was another guy (I forget his name) who did not make it. He got drunk one night and beat his girlfriend up, and they violated his parole and sent him back. But they were all on parole. Oh,

Al Armor.

That is one of the reasons I was not a good prison guard: I had more respect and admiration for a lot of these inmates than I did the guards. Al Armor was a super-sharp dude. He could play a guitar [and] sing real good. Ronald Harshman was one of the smartest people I ever met in my life. Arthur Adams went from a sixteen-year-old boy on death row to having a college education. I admire that. I just admired and really looked up to these guys.

L: You are going to school with them?

R: Yes, they were going to school. They were on something called study release. They were at Santa Fe Correctional Institution, and a van would drop them off at the University of Florida every morning. Now, later on they did away with that program. The state representative over in Starke introduced a bill in the [Florida] legislature, and now no convict goes to college. I guess they know what they are doing. To me, they could send them dern prisoners to Harvard cheaper than they could keep them in prison. I forgot how many millions of dollars they were spending on the college program in prison, but if only a third of the men who took college classes did not come back, they would break even. They would save that much money.

L: So you are going to school with these six guys.

R: Yes. They were in a position where they could not become involved in the antiwar activities.

L: Oh, this is your peer group? These are your friends, folks you know?

R: Well, they were home boys from state prison [laughter]. I was sort of like an ex-convict, and they were all home boys. I took a class with some of these guys, and we helped each other out. I helped them out a little bit. I never really felt comfortable with them too much before when they were convicts and I had been a guard, and that wall was still between us. But they were running around, and the antiwar thing was going on.

My brother was going to the University of Florida at that time. He is the one who is a public defender now. He is very, very, very conservative. He is one of these people who goes to all the Gator games and stuff. He had a van painted orange and blue and all that jerky stuff.

L: So you are really not in any position to be any more active than you are, right? You have other responsibilities. You have your concerns.

R: Yes. Then again, everybody going to college was pretty much that way. But I did what I could. I participated in several demonstrations. I participated in the thing at the Reitz Union. When the riots were going on I did not know what to do because there was total confusion. But to me, running out there and playing chicken with the cops was just dumb. I mean, that was just dumb. I would stand there and watch it just like I would watch a fight when I was in high school. I just did not see going out and doing dumb things, and that is what I figured it was.

Now, things like the protest . . . The only thing that bothered me about the Thanksgiving Day protest [is] we were standing there protesting in front of Tigert Hall, and it is Thanksgiving Day and the streets were deserted. I said: "Hell, ain't nobody seeing us. We gotta start thinking this thing through a little bit better." But marching in the homecoming parade was really good; I thought that was good to have us there in the homecoming parade.

When Scott got involved in the Gainesville Eight thing I was working for the finance company.

L: You had already graduated.

R: Yes, I had already graduated, and I was working. That is when the trial happened, not when he was arrested, but when the trial was going on. I was walking around wearing a coat and tie then chasing deadbeats, and I really could not [participate]. I went down there, and I sat in on a couple of court sessions. I was there one time when Scott was being tried for marijuana possession. I helped whenever I could.

In 1975 Saigon fell, and I got a job here in Putnam County.

L: You got a master's degree in education?

R: Yes. I graduated in 1973 with a B.A. in sociology, and I went back to the University of Florida and got my . . . Well, I worked here one year with just a bachelor's degree, and that summer, the next summer, is when I got my master's, 1976.

L: So you got this job, and then you went back.

R: Yes, and got my master's. Then after I started work here in Putnam County, the way the system works is when you are a schoolteacher you work three years on what they call an annual contract, which means that at the end of the school year they can make a decision [whether to rehire you for the next year], just like if you hired a plumber. You pay him the money, he fixes your plumbing, and he has completed the contract. The next time you need a plumber, you can go hire him

or you can go hire somebody else. That is the way it worked. They hire you to teach school for one year, and at the end of the year they decide whether they want to hire you back next year or not. They are under no legal obligation to do it. At the end of three years they either have to give you continuing contract or let you go for good.

L: Continuing contract is . . .

R: [If you have a continuing contract] you have to rape a cheerleader [to be fired].  
[Laughter.]

L: So to speak.

R: So to speak. I mean, once you have continuing contract, buddy, you are in.

L: OK. So it is a tenure thing.

R: Yes, it is a tenure thing. Then it is almost impossible for them to get rid of you. It is an involved and a long legal thing.

L: After 1973 is there much of a movement in Gainesville?

R: I have no idea. I left Gainesville, and I did not go back. I swear, between 1975 to about 1985 I did not go to Gainesville more than once a year. First off I was really worried about finding a job because of my reputation and the trouble I had been in. I went to the University of Florida to my faculty advisor, and he said: "You do not have anything to worry about, Eddie. Go over to Palatka. Nobody in Palatka ever reads the newspaper anyway" [laughter].

L: Is that true?

R: Yes. So I came over here to Palatka, and these people have never heard of the Raiford prison riot, and I do not think they knew that the Vietnam War was going on; I really don't. Anyway, what I did was I went to an interview with a principal, and I can be a good-old country boy when I want to be. I sat down and told him I was from Lake Butler and I grew up eating grits and corn bread and I stole hogs and all that, and he liked the way I looked and the way I talked, and he hired me. I taught one year of geography, seventh grade. The next year they put me in charge of alternate classes, a special class for kids who are disruptive, kids who are incorrigible. Now, I am a second-year teacher, buddy, and I got all the mean motherfuckers. But I want to tell you something. After Florida State Prison, teaching is easy.

L: I was going to ask you which was worse.

R: Teaching is easy, man. In fact, teaching is the easiest thing in the world. There are teachers here who whine and cry and say: "It is so hard. I cannot stand it. My nerves are upset." I say, "You ought to be in Vietnam or Raiford where somebody is stabbing somebody to death or something." I said, "Schoolteaching is easy." It really is.

L: So you are here making sure you have a career.

R: Yes. And I have ten more years until I retire.

L: What do you do over the summers?

R: I used to work over at the fort in St. Augustine. Then I got rebellious again. I am going to be honest and truthful with you. I am forty-eight years old, and working at that fort was something that I knew I could not keep doing much longer anyway. I mean, that is a young person's occupation. During the summer it is hot in there, and you have to run up and down those steps. Plus, it is the boringest job in the world. I mean, it is just totally, tediously boring. You stand out there on the drawbridge or you stand in the sally port and answer the same questions over and over again. It is hot and it is humid and it is muggy in there. Denise knows about all that. Plus, you have all the little politics and crap like that that goes on in there.

Anyway, I taught summer school a couple or three years. Last summer I did not do anything, and I thought I would be bored and miserable. I was not. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed myself that summer. See, I get paid twelve months a year.

L: How is that?

R: Well, I make \$32,000 a year, and they give it to me in twelve paychecks, so I am getting paid during the summer whether I am working or not. So whether you have a summer job or not is not really all that important. If you do have a summer job, that is gravy, or that is extra money, but if you do not it is not the end of the world.

L: I see. Two more things. How did you get involved or reinvolved with Veterans for Peace?

R: Yuki, my wife, got sick, and she had three surgeries. I spent about four months over in Gainesville at North Florida Regional Hospital. I thought she was going to die.

L: What was wrong with her?

R: She had six inches of her colon removed. She had diverticulitis, then she had a bowel blockage, and then she had her gall bladder removed. It was like some kind of horrible nightmare, and I could not wake up. It got me to thinking. I said, "What [i this is is a wake-up call from God," and I decided [to do something meaningful]. I do not know how many more years I have to be on earth, but I have to do something besides just work for a living and make money.

I bumped into Scott by accident. Actually, I bumped into somebody who knew Scott who gave me Scott's phone number, and I went over to his house to see him. Scott had been on the same mental trip that I had been on. After the Gainesville Eight trial and after he was shot, Scott said: "That is it. I am finished. I have done my duty." For about ten years Scott got married, had kids, and got on with his life, just like I came over here to Palatka, got a job, and got on with my life.

L: And you had not had contact with any of these people.

R: No. I had put all that behind me. I never mentioned Raiford and I never mentioned the protest days and I really did not say that much about the Vietnam War. Now, I will talk about the Vietnam War with my students, but I will not tell war stories. I will not tell them anything personal that happened to me. But I will tell them about the Gulf of Tonkin incident and all that stuff. I am a history teacher. I am not up here telling everybody my business.

When [President Ronald] Reagan started doing that shit down in Nicaragua, that is when it started bothering me.

L: What year is your wife having her surgery?

R: 1989. The stuff in Nicaragua bothered me, but I ignored it. I said no, no, no. Anyway, while Yuki was in the hospital, right after she got in the hospital, I got . . . The way Scott is [is] you go to Scott's house, you talk to Scott, and he gives you a bunch of shit. You take it home and read it, and you have to take it back to him. So you take the stuff back, and he gives you another pile of shit. You take it home, read it, take it back, and then he gives you something else to read or videotape. What he was giving me was videotape. So I am going over there every weekend, and he is educating me. I had been into history. I had spent the last ten years studying history. I had read a ton of books, and I had gotten all involved in historical things, and I did not want to think about what is happening right now.

L: Working at the fort.

R: Yes, working at the fort, doing living history stuff. So he and I got to talking. I

want to be honest and truthful with you. When I started going over there and started hanging around with Vets for Peace and started going to demonstrations again, God Almighty, it is hard to explain how good that felt. It felt so good. Just about the time Scott and I got back together the Persian Gulf war happened, and we had that big, big, big demonstration. Look at that photo. God, that felt good. I mean, it just felt good. It was like old times again. That guy is a Vietnam [vet]. That is me. That is Tandy right there. Tandy got killed; his brother shot him.

L: Tandy Byrd. This is an obituary.

R: Yes.

L: So this is the big demonstration in Gainesville?

R: Yes.

L: It is on campus.

R: Right, during the Persian Gulf war. I wrote several letters to the editor about the Persian Gulf war, too, and then I got involved in the Columbus protest. I loved that.

L: Tell me about that. I read your article that you gave me on the Columbus protest. How did you get involved with that?

R: I do not remember. See, every morning when I come to school the first thing I do is sit here and read *The Gainesville Sun* and the *Florida Times-Union*. I read an article about the Columbus ships coming to St. Augustine, and I said, "Somebody ought to do something," so we did. I liked it. I am pretty damn proud of it. It made me feel good.

L: Were any of the Vets for Peace people with you in St. Augustine?

R: Yes. All of them except Scott, the asshole. Let me see here. I think the thing that I like best about being reinvolved is the people you meet. I have made some real good friends. That is the Columbus protest.

L: So what is Vets for Peace doing these days?

R: Well, we are involved in this Vietnam Friendship Village project, and we are also protesting the School of Americas in Columbus. We have the solstice coming up. I want you to make sure you come to the solstice.

L: What is the solstice?

R: A concert on the winter solstice, December 21. Let me show you something.

L: That is one thing that I completely forgot to ask you earlier was about your religious background.

R: I was born in an Advent Christian school, and in 1980 I became a Catholic. I became a Catholic because I could not stand the idea of being a redneck. Let me show you something. That is me right there.

L: At Raiford.

R: Yes. The back of my head is on the other picture.

L: What do you mean, you cannot stand ["the idea of being a redneck"]?

R: Well, I just did not want to be . . .

L: Southern Protestant?

R: Yes. See this? That is my uncle.

L: Which one?

R: Earl Farnell. Remember I told you about my middle name? See, that is another thing, too. When I did that thing at Raiford, my family totally disowned me. I went five years without seeing any of them, and I did not go to my mother's funeral or my stepfather's funeral.

L: Has your relationship with your family changed since then?

R: No.

L: Do you see any of your brothers?

R: My brother who is in education I go see every now and then.

L: OK. Is there anything else you would like to put on the tape?

R: No. That is about it.

L: I would like to thank you for talking to me. We definitely have a valuable contribution to our archive.