David L. Barber

West Jordan, UT
CW4
Army
Chief Warrant Officer
United States Army
"Escalation"

Interviewer
Thank you for coming in today. Tell us briefly about your early life and how you joined up or got drafted to go in the Vietnam War.

David Barber
Okay. I was raised on a farm in Ohio, northwestern Ohio. My family were farmers. My dad had 160 acres. And growing up I raised hogs, which is going to be significant as my story goes on. And in 1969, I guess it was, Richard Nixon decided to have a lottery for a draft and that was the first one and out of 365 numbers mine was number 113. So with the war continuing at that time, I knew I was going to be drafted. And up 'til that point in high school I'd always been interested in aviation. And even in the fifth grade I was writing to a helicopter company to get information. So I guess there's never been a time that I didn't think about flying. And I'd gotten my pilot's license by raising hogs as a youth. And so I got my draft notice, I went in to acknowledge that, I guess you want to call it that. Anyway, I thought, well, I'm gonna go talk to a recruiter because at that time they had a two-year enlistment which was the same as the draft, if you got drafted. And I did that and I was gonna sign up, enlist for two years as a clearance checker which would guarantee me staying in the United States. And on a Saturday morning when I was scheduled to go in and sign the paperwork I had leased an airplane for that morning. And when I went in this guy was fairly long-winded and I told him I had to go to the airport. And when he asked me why, I told him that I was a pilot. He tore up the paperwork in front of me and said, "Have you ever heard of the Warrant Officer Program," and I said, "No," and he proceeded to tell me. And that's what got me in the Army. Winded up in the Warrant Officer Academy.

Interviewer
Did you have any thoughts about Vietnam, pro or con?

David Barber
I was very neutral on it. I would watch the carnage that they would show on TV every night with Walter Cronkite. I would see that and I was aware that it was happening. A couple of times, while I was in high school I made a trip to Columbus where Ohio State University is and I experienced the college campus there first-hand, which was new for me, being from the country. And there was some radical things going on there at the time. So consequently when I got my notice–my uncle had been in the Army in World War II. He was the only other one in our family that had ever served. I shouldn't say that, my brother did, too. He got his notice in the early '60s, so he did his two years. And he got out. So when it came my turn I just went ahead and said, "Okay, I'll do it." Not thinking anything about the political aspect of should we be there, should we not be there. It was a call to duty and I just went and served.

Interviewer
And so after this enlister guy tore up your papers, you enrolled in the Warrant Officer program. Explain that a little bit and then how you got into flying.

David Barber
Okay, it was quite interesting because he, the recruiter, told me right up front that I'd be going to Vietnam if I got into this program. And I said, "Okay." I said, "I'll sign up. It sounds interesting. It's something I'd want to do, but you have to convince my parents that this was a good thing." I was the youngest of the two kids and going to war is not something that you look forward to. So anyway, he actually came to the farm, spoke with my parents and told them what the program was about. And they let me make the decision.
And interestingly enough, I could choose at that time whether I wanted to go into airplanes or if I wanted to go into helicopters. And having my fixed-wing rating in airplanes I said, "Well I want to fly helicopters." And so I enlisted for that and went under a delayed entry program for–oh, I guess I delayed like about two months. And I went in in April. It was a rather interesting story there. But anyway, when I get into telling what really happened to me I'll get into

that. So anyway, I went in and signed up and that's how I ended up into that program. And what the program is, basically with a high school education at that time you could join up under the Warrant Officer Candidate program and they would, after basic training, everybody that had to go into the military for that program went to Fort Polk, Louisiana. No matter where you were in the United States, that's where you went to basic training. There we joined up with National Guard personnel from around the United States as well. And those were the only two that made up the basic training companies that we had there.

And from that, I went for a little vacation at home after basic training and then we had to report to Fort Walters, Texas. That was the way you had to do it. We got off of the bus at Fort Walters and we're talking hundreds of candidates getting off the bus at this time. And I believe it was on a weekend that we arrived because one of the TAC officers, which were the people in charge of the candidates, came to the bus wearing a civilian PT outfit, muscle shirt kind of deal. And the first thing he says, "But don't let my appearance fool you for a second." And as we all got off the buses, we were in formation and someone asked about civilian licenses. And they started with the highest one that you could obtain and worked down to a private pilot's license or even a student pilot's license, and I had my private. And when they got to the bottom of the private they had about 13 of us standing over to the side. And the TAC officer walked over and says, "Congratulations, you're now the fixed-wing class." And I says, "Well I didn't enlist for fixed wing, I know how to fly an airplane." We happen to have a gentleman there by the name of Paul Conner who has prior service and he enlisted for the Warrant Officer Flight program and he whispered to me, he says, "This is where you want to be." I says, "Really?" Because I was new to the Army. But I said, "I wanted to fly helicopters." He says, "You can get those later. Those are easy to get in the Army. But an airplane is really hard. So you need to take this." Well, they marched us off and we went into the billets and I got thinking about it, I had a written contract saying helicopters and I was upset about that fact. So as I was heading to the door to leave and to resign from this and probably become an infantry enlisted personnel for the next two years in Vietnam, he physically stopped me. Stopped me at the door and says, "Give it two days." He goes, "If you still feel this way in two days, I'll let you go." And that was the best advice anybody ever gave me in the Army because I stopped and by that night probably I could see that the fixed wing was the place to be and not helicopters.

It was probably 95 degrees at Fort Walters at that time. I was in an air-conditioned building on the third floor looking down upon the helicopter guys in formation, out in the street, doing push-ups and being harassed by the TAC officers. And they left us alone. And I thought, "well, this isn't so bad." So the pre-flight program is what we were all in at the time, whether you were helicopters or airplanes. And we did six weeks of nothing but academics and learning about aerodynamics and becoming an officer in the Army. And then from there, the fixed wing was sent to Fort Stewart, Georgia. At Fort Stewart they issued us the flight equipment that was necessary and we started flight training. While that was going on the helicopter guys, you asked me to explain the program. And so helicopter guys started in TH-55 helicopters or the Raven, the OH-23 there at Fort Walters. And we'd join up with them later at Fort Rucker and we'd all graduate together. I was flying a T-41 Mescalero at Fort Stewart and even though I had my license and everyone there had their license, you started out as a rookie not knowing anything. And they taught you the Army way and in some ways that was good and in some ways that was bad that you had your license. But I found it a help. I didn't have a lot of hours, I wasn't a high-time guy at that point, so any instruction they gave me I took it to heart and acted upon it. So I didn't have any problems with it. Some people did, as they were set in their ways.

Interviewer

How old were you when you went in?

David Barber

Okay, that was in '69 when I got the thing and I was 19, I guess.

Interviewer

And had you said the hog business allowed you to get into the airlines. Was that because you made money doing hogs?

David Barber

Yes. Very simply put, I would buy some feeder pigs from the auction, bring 'em home, and in 90 days they'd be fed out and become marketable. And I would usually try and sell 'em in groups of three. And with that, I'd take the money from one to buy more feeder pigs. The money from the second one to buy the feed and all, and the third one went to the airport.

Interviewer

So you could get your lessons.

David Barber

That's how I got my lessons, yup.

Interviewer

What about basic training? This is after basic?

David Barber
Yes. Following basic training is when you started the flight school. It was a year long, basically, it was three months your basic training and then nine months of flight school. So it was basically a year from the time you started you'd finish up.

Interviewer
So you're there flying these trainers?

David Barber
The T-41, yeah, Mescalero. So they taught you everything you needed to know. The syllabus was quite extensive, I won't even get into that here. You could probably go online or something to find out what all that was. But you'd have academics half a day and then you'd have a half of day of flying. And in that you'd get an hour and a half of real flying and the rest of the time was talking to instructors, or simulator training or something like this, you know? So after we finished up that phase of our training, we went to Fort Rucker, Alabama. And there we joined up with our rotary wing class that was coming from Fort Walters; they'd finished up their primary training.

And the first thing that we got into was the instrument phase and I assumed that they were too at the same time. And in the last phase would be your tactics phase. And for the instrument phase we used the T-42. It was a Baron civilian aircraft basically. They just put Army paint on it. And as it turned out, I had an instructor that was a turn-around candidate who had just gotten his W-1 bars and they turned him around and made him an instructor out there which was kind of interesting because he was as much a rookie almost as the rest of us that were going through the school. And the only thing that was memorable about that was first of all, I hadn't flown any multi-engine aircraft and that's what this was, it's a twin engine and retractable gear and all. It was a complex airplane. And one of the things that I did wrong–and it was the only pink slip that I ever received in flight school that I remember, anyway–and a pink slip was a failure for whatever bad thing you had done. And I deserved it in this case. There was an instructor and two students in the airplane, I was in the left seat as a student. And we had landed and it was common to do an after-landing check and follow the procedures there. And I was using my check-list, but rather than reaching for the flap switch to bring them up after we had cleared the runway, I went to the gear switch in the landing gear. And I immediately flipped that to up position while we were still on the ground. Fortunately the safety switches were working or they would've just collapsed right there and we would've been sitting on the ground.

But this gave our new instructor quite a dilemma. What do you do now? Will the safety switches work for the entire time of taxiing back to the end of the runway and taking off or do you call maintenance and they lift the thing up with a crane and you recycle the gear? He wasn't knowledgeable and we certainly weren't knowledgeable. So we took a calculated risk. At a very slow pace we taxied back to the end of the runway. We took the controls, in this case, and did a short fuel takeoff and everything went fine. I got my pink slip for the day. That was one good story.

So after that phase, the last phase was tactics. And for tactics we used the O-1 Bird Dog made by Cessna, it was tail-dragger, tandem seating, one person in front of the other. And it was rigged with rockets that you could use if you needed to, and that was the only time I ever got to shoot rocket was during the training phase at Fort Rucker. We did a lot of short-field landings over trees into grassy pastures, mud, whatever because in Vietnam you were expected to be able to do that in that type of aircraft. They used it for artillery spotting over there, for bring the jets in FACs, forward air controlling–everything like that. So even though the war was kind of winding down, that's what we expected to be doing over there, and to be sending us there for that purpose. So after the tactics phase, we graduated and we got our orders. In and my case I got lucky. Like I said, there was about 12 or 13 guys in our class and the top of the class would get their pick of an airplane and then from there on down it was pretty much whatever the Army needed. And they offered me an opportunity to fly for the Army Security Agency while in Vietnam which meant I'd get to transition into another airplane before I went over there. And I took it because they told me it would be clean sheets every night. I wouldn't be in the field, I wouldn't have to deal with that. Because of the type of missions we'd be flying, it was in a secure area where we kept the airplanes and our company would be there on the airport and all that. So that sounded good. And so I opted to do that and that's what I did while I was over there.

Interviewer
Tell us about transferring over there.

David Barber
After completing at Fort Rucker, Alabama, I went home for a week or so. I had to come back to Fort Rucker and got my transition in what was called a U-8 Seminole aircraft. Multi-engine again, STOL recep, not turbine. It was an old '50s airplane, basically, at that time in 1971. But it was a '50s aircraft. Nothing high-tech about it at all. After we got qualified in that they sent us to Fort Huachuca, Arizona and there we got educated in the equipment in the mission that we would be flying in Vietnam. Exciting job. It was really fun to do. And not getting into any details, what we were doing was just locating enemy using their radio signals. And that was what we were doing.

Interviewer
Your job was to fly around and locate them using their signals?

David Barber
Using their radio signals we would find them.
Interviewer
And then you'd report that back to the --?
David Barber
The headquarters. They could use it. Some of it was used for intelligence. We had operators in the aircraft that were able to understand what was being sent and if a particular Viet Cong or Vietnamese was a regular sender of information let's say, then they wouldn't act upon it to take 'em out. Other times they'd bring the Air Force in and use that information for tactical purposes. But it was an intelligence gathering as much as identifying with what we did.
Interviewer
So did you fly behind enemy lines just about all the time I guess?
David Barber
There were no lines there. You were in Vietnam and we would go wherever we were needed. We were assigned an area that we would fly in. If it was a four-hour mission we'd be there for the full four hours. We'd take a box lunch with us and some drinks. There were two pilots and one operator; that was the standard configuration for a mission at that time. I started out, when I got to Vietnam, I was hoping to get into a unit over there where I'd get another type of aircraft, a bigger aircraft. When I reported at battalion headquarters, there were three of us. And two other gentlemen that I had finished flight school with. And as we stood in front of the commanding officer and he was to determine where we were to go the other two gentlemen got to go where I wanted to go and I got stuck where I least wanted to go and that was in Can Tho down in the south part and I was gonna be flying a very antiquated aircraft called a U-6. It was a de Havilland Beaver and it came out of Canada. They'd been using them since the beginning of the Vietnam War. It was a tail-dragger and it was just an old airplane. Round engine, you know? Today I cherish the time that I had in that aircraft. But back then it wasn't what I wanted to hear because I was thinking, okay, I get out of the Army, get on with the airlines, I needed some heavy time because that's what they look at. And I wasn't gonna get it flying U-6's. And the other two guys went on and did their year over there flying twin-engine airplanes. One became an American Airlines' pilot and the other one went to IBM as an employee there. And I stayed in the Army and I hadn't planned that. Never did was expecting to make it a career. And I'll talk about that after I get done.
Interviewer
Tell us some of those experiences you had.
David Barber
Okay. Yeah, this is cool. I have basically two I want to talk about. One is humorous and the other one is a serious one. The humorous one was at the billeting, it was a single-story building and it just had rooms adjacent to each other. And one night we had made a club out of one of the rooms where we had the music there and the bar and all that. And it was just for our use. And one night this gentleman came in with a Tommy gun that he had acquired somewhere. The thing was loaded and it has a very sensitive trigger. And the next thing you know, he unloaded that whole Tommy gun in this club and nobody got hurt. Never hit a thing with it. We all hit the floor and that was it. We just tried to get as small as we could. He was totally out of control, this thing. He'd never used one in his life and here he had it in his hand and off it went. So it was funny, looking back on it now. I mean it was quite humorous but it wasn't at the time.
Interviewer
Was he a regular U.S. Army--?
David Barber
I think the Viet Cong had it and it was confiscated and then somehow it got into our hands. It wasn't uncommon. You could find Viet Cong weapons readily available over there. And a lot of people had weapons in their hooches so in case the Viet Cong came through the fence or whatever and they did infiltrate, you had some defense. You weren't supposed to have it, but you know how that goes. If you didn't let the higher-ups know that you had it, it was okay kind of deal. Get away with it and you're fine. I only got rocketed once. I had a really great life over there. As far as being in danger, one time after a mission and I was on the ramp and we got a rocket attack. And three rockets came in and some debris came down on the airplane. I was underneath the wing by that time. And that was the only time that I know of that I was in danger, quote/unquote. And then the other time was in An Loc, back in '72, the North Vietnamese had Russian tanks and for whatever reason I was flying at 1500 feet over Russian tanks doing this intelligence. I was looking down on these tanks and never gave it a thought about where I was putting myself and my crew but that's where we were assigned to be so that's what I did. Looking back on that it was a pretty dumb thing to do. That's when I was flying U-8s. The first seven months or so eight months, I was flying the U-6 and then we were shutting down that facility because we were pulling out of Vietnam, or downsizing at that time.
So we moth-balled all those airplanes and left Can Tho and those of us that still had time on our tour got sent to

Long Than North, just north of Saigon a little ways. And there I got back into the U-8 Seminole again and did my time. But, as it turned out, I was the last guy in the battalion that was Beaver qualified, that's the U-6, it's called a Beaver. And so while all of my friends were coming home early–and I have a plaque stating that I should've come home in June, I was extended for my full year to September because I could take guys in the Beaver back to Saigon because I could put probably six fellahs in the back of that airplane with their bags and everything. And I was shuttling back and forth. And seeing how I was the last Beaver pilot, they forced me to stay there for that purpose. But anyway, my first seven months, while I was there flying the Beavers, there was a mission where it was just a payroll mission. It was a Beaver, didn't have any classified equipment in it. And we flew to Saigon. I don't remember where the gentleman was from that was in the back with the weapon, but I did have a gunner of sorts. And this other pilot, myself, there were three of us. And we picked up the payroll–cash at that time–military pay currency was cash, kind of deal for those that wanted to receive that in Vietnam. And we made periodic stops at airplanes all the way back to Can Tho and the pay master was on board with us too, there was four of us on the airplane. And he made the payments and we were basically on our last leg of the day, took off and we were between the two branches of the Mekong River and we had an engine failure. The push rod on number one failed, broke completely, and it allowed the oil out of the engine to come all over the windshield and I couldn't see a thing going forward. This particular mission I was the pilot in command and in the left seat doing the flying. I had heard stories that this airplane would fly even if you lost a cylinder, left the airplane. Well, not true. It was a joke or whatever. So we were losing altitude and I ended up putting it in a rice paddy. But it was a dry rice paddy and everything ended up okay. I was going to put it on a road and I set up for it and I had to be looking out the left window. I actually put the airplane in what was called a slip. So you're flying at an angle as you're going down and I put the window down on the left side so I could see forward.

Interviewer

And you had one good engine?

David Barber

No, this is a single engine. I'm going down. Yeah, U-6 is a single engine. And yeah, I knew I was going somewhere, there was no doubt about that. And this road ran between Can Tho and Bing Long was pretty good road. Two-laner and everything was looking good. And as I made my final decision, basically, okay, this is where I was gonna put it, a convoy pulled out. Bunch of trucks, Army trucks, onto the road. So I told Joe, the guy that was with me, I said, "This isn't gonna work." And I looked to the left and these rice paddies were out there and they were dry. It was a dry season, I guess. And so I just opted for one of those. Got it down okay and then as we were rolling out, he could see that there was a dike coming up on his side. And evidently it was gonna intersect with our particular roll out and so he did what was called a ground loop and he just punched the left rudder and turned the airplane at a 90 degrees and our right main gear went into a furrow just before the dike. And so the only damage done to the airplane by us was we broke the seal on that tire. So I got a flat tire there. And they slung it out. I sent the rest of the crew members back. We did a Mayday right away. As soon as we had a problem, Joe was on the radios. And so we were talking to a helicopter that was in the area right then. He said, "I'll be there as soon as you're down." And he was and he landed right beside us and gave us a smoke grenade. And he said, "If you got any problems, I'll go up and look around. If you get any problems, just pop it and I'll come in and get ya." And of course they were sending for other aircraft. And so a Huey came in and got the rest of my crew and I thought well I'm gonna stay with the airplane. And the reason I did that was after we got out of the airplane and was just looking at it, one of the fellahs and I don't know which one it was said, "Mr. Barber, take a look." And when I looked up, looked out in every direction, all I saw were people coming towards us. And all I had in the way of defense was a .38 pistol and the other pilot had a .38 and then we had one guy with an M-16 and that was it. And they said, "Do you think they're bad guys?" And I said, "We're gonna find out pretty fast." And honest to God, what I thought right then was, "What would John Wayne do?" That was the first thing that, when I saw all these guys coming, "What would John Wayne do?"

Interviewer

And you were still in South Vietnam?

David Barber

Yeah. I Corps was the furthest up north and there's I, II, III, and IV. And this was in IV. And as it turned out, everybody was good guys and next thing I know I've got kids around there with grenades hanging off themselves. And I'm going, "This is really dangerous." Well the next thing I know, our allies came and I asked them to get these kids away, with the grenades and that. And so they took charge of giving me a perimeter as such. But I thought, "I'm gonna stay with the airplane. They're gonna send in a helicopter to sling it out of here," and so I thought I'd stay with it. If I had to do it again I would've left because I found out the VC were on their way. And as soon as the guys got there, they were going to rig it for slinging, I left. And they were getting really close at that point in time so that was really dumb for me to stay there. That's okay. All's well that ends well.

Interviewer

Were you ever in North Vietnam?

David Barber
Because I was down in the southern part, I didn't go to the DMZ and flew. We were assigned some Western missions, if you know what country is over there. And that's where I went. And that's all I can say about that one.

Interviewer
Even today, huh?

David Barber
Even today. It was the same mission. It was nothing different. It was just we were in some places we weren't supposed to be over there, you know? And that happened to be one of those places.

Interviewer
You had no firepower on the airplane itself?

David Barber
Unarmed. Exactly. We were reconnaissance flights. Now, there again, this is kind of interesting. If we was to have a problem with an aircraft that was equipped and we had a call sign that would identify us when we were on missions. And if something would've happened during one of those missions where the aircraft was gonna be on the ground, we needed to get away from it as soon as possible because the Air Force was gonna destroy it. They were coming in. And so when we did have that problem, we were screaming that we were a non-crypto aircraft so that they wouldn't think that they had to overt them. Because I was more concerned about us probably than the VC at that point in time. But Joe did a great job on communicating. As it turned out, I actually have the tape from the tower because we were talking to the tower, we were getting pretty close to Can Tho at that time. And so after it was all over with and the airplane was back at Can Tho, I went up into the tower and I said, "Hey, you got the tapes from our little escapade here?" And I actually got a cassette tape of Joe talking to the tower and calling Mayday and with the helicopter and everything like that. And that's in a safe-deposit box.

David Barber
And before that little escapade, even though I didn't do anything up and above, I got what was called a Broken Wing award from the Army 'cause it was something that they did back then. They still have it today. But back then they'd only issue it to one individual and the crew, who was the pilot in command, that was me at that time. But Joe did as much as me to save the airplane because he saw the ditch coming up. So I always thought that was so unfair. And at some point in time in the Army they decided that they could make that award for more than just one individual if it was a crew concept and someone did something significant to save the aircraft then they should be recognized. And so six years ago, when I found out that this was the case, I had that tape and I had taken pictures after we were down on the ground and I've got those too–I hope I have them with me–just had a little camera, so I took some shots. So I had some evidence and it showed that Joe was significant in this as well. And so I contacted Fort Rucker, Alabama and with a very short timeframe involved, I got it approved. They issued the certificate and we got it awarded to Joe. I conned him into coming to the Air Force base for the air show in September of that year. And I had a one-star general present him with a Broken Wing award. It was great.

Interviewer
Tell me about your relationships with the crew.

David Barber
The officers were very close. We associated together. They tried to keep us apart from the enlisted personnel because they lived in a different place on the camp than we did. We still knew 'em very well because I was a mess officer over there and so I'd see 'em coming in and out of the mess hall all the time. And a warrant officer has got a unique position. You've got the commissioned officer, you've got the warrant officer, and you have the enlisted personnel. And the warrant is sort of like in between and can associate going up or down, either way. And so you didn't have that class system for them that you had between the true officers, the commissioned officers, and the enlisted. They tended to stay apart. But the warrants partied with the enlisted. They'd invite us over to their billets and that kind of thing. And we'd do officer of the day, we had to check on them every night and that kind of thing and it was more social interaction there than what it would be with a commissioned officer and the enlisted.

Interviewer
You got a little choked up talking about Joe. So you must have had a good relationship.

David Barber
Yeah, still do. Out of the guys in flight school, there were I think–I don't know how many finished up, maybe eight or ten, I don't remember. But anyway, all of us are still alive but one. And the gentleman who stopped me physically from resigning, was killed in a plane six months before Joe got his award. He was gonna be there too. So anyway, the rest of us are alive and doing well. Yeah, I'm too emotional.

Interviewer
That's perfectly okay. Were there any other dangerous situations that you had?

David Barber
No. Like I said, because I'd gone Army security on the scene and all that, it was very good. I had a good year over there. It was a pleasurable experience. I didn't want to be interacting with the local populous, okay? Even though we used their roads. Being the mess officer I used to go down in trucks and sign for food at the distribution and bring it back for us to use. So I got to see quite a bit of scenery going back and forth but I was in the air just about every day. I got over a thousand hours of flying while I was over there so I saw most of Vietnam from the air and then very little on the ground. But you know, when other people would go down to the village or party or have a drink or whatever, I didn't want to do it and I didn't do it. I stayed on base unless I had an official reason to go to get something. And that's just–I was young and naïve, I guess, and I just was happy with the way things were and didn't have a desire to go out there and do what everybody else was doing.

Interviewer
What are your thoughts about the Vietnam War in general?

David Barber
Well, history has proven that we probably shouldn't have been there, but it was a political thing. McNamara has written a book and all that about it all. And based upon, it looked like the politics that was involved was the reason we pulled out. While I was there, I mean we were there thinking that we were gonna win a war. I wasn't there just as a police action or killing time. I certainly would've opted to go there had I been told to. The people were fantastic that I had dealt with over there and the indigenous people who lived there. Even today I think they're still friendly to us even though we really messed them over. And my views are different on war, I guess. I don't think it's a good thing. I'm against what's going on now, I have been for the last 10 years. I think there's other alternatives, that's about it. I don't have much else to say about it.

Interviewer
If you were to speak to future generations, given your experience, is there anything you'd like to say?

David Barber
I think, in my case anyway, your views change. When you're young you think one thing and as you get older they change. So you need to be aware that what you feel is important today probably won't be important later. And the things that you feel today, you have no comprehension of the environment that will affect you as you grow older and the decisions you'll make based upon that environmental impact. And that has such an effect on people. And when you're young, you haven't got the experiences to draw upon. And as you get older you have those more experiences and you have a wider field of vision towards things and I guess that's why I've pretty much become a pacifist, if you want to call it that. Because I don't see anything good about it other than to the industrial complex. Every life that's lost, every person that loses a leg today is wrong. That's it.

David Barber
They said, "what do you want to do? People are leaving Vietnam and getting out of the Army and going their own way with life." And I'd started my education over there, going to the University of Maryland because I got tired of going to the bar and getting drunk every night, you know, so I need to do something else. So I started my education over there and when I was getting ready to deer roast which means leaving the country and going somewhere, they offered me to stay in the Army and get qualified in a bigger airplane and to go to El Paso, Texas. My brother had been in El Paso, and in junior high school I'd gone there to visit him. And I thought, "that's a nice place." So I said, "I got nothing better to do, I'll just go ahead and stay in the Army and continue my education at University of Texas, El Paso." And so one year led to another and next thing you know, you've got a career.

Interviewer
How long did you stay in?

David Barber
I did 24 years total. In 1979 I opted to get out. I was, at that time, flying helicopters at Fort Campbell, Kentucky and decided I'm gonna give the airlines a shot because it was just the right time to do that. So I immediately got into the Georgia Guard flying a bigger airplane, a Mohawk. And so I spent four and a half years trying to get on with the airlines and flying this Mohawk and that was the only thing I did. I didn't work, I just was attempting to get on with the airlines. I flew a little bit of corporate at that time too, just to stay active. But it didn't work out because of the controller strike and Regan fired those guys and then Braniff went under so labor relations board and Washington dictated they had to hire all those guys before they could take on new hires. And I was within 100 of being called for another major airline when this Braniff thing took place and I said, "I don't think I want to get involved in this enterprise where the government can control you like this." So one day, in Georgia, while I was pulling my weekend duty, a gentleman saw a position here in Utah for what was called Active Guard and Reserve at the time. Didn't know a thing about it but I'd been here skiing and I thought this is a good place to live. So I looked at that and applied for the position. I got it and that put me back on active duty again. So with the Guard and everything else, I did 24 years. Ended up flying the biggest airplane the Army ever had, after I got here, and that was a C-7 Caribou. And one of the two airplanes we had is up at Hill Air Force Base; it's sitting there in the museum right there. I was

on the airplane when it went in there, actually. I wasn't part of the crew but I was qualifying, hadn't flown it for a while, I just went along for the ride, take it up to Hill.

Interviewer

So how long have you lived in Utah?

David Barber

That was 1984 when I came out. I retired in '94.

Interviewer

Describe again the hotel room and how you made this room the bar.

David Barber

When we left Can Tho and was reassigned to Long Than North, there were a good number of us that had been in flight school together. And so we all decided to take over this one building. It was probably 15 or 20 rooms in this building, it was a single story. It had the tin roof and there was a sidewalk. It was like a motel, basically. And so the sidewalk ran out in front of it and then you would go in what you'd call your hooch, your little apartment. And there was two people who stayed in each hooch. And then on the other side of the sidewalk you had this huge sandbagged emplacement so if there was a rocket attack or something like that, those sandbags would protect the hooch area. Unless they got a direct hit, it wouldn't bother us. And so we decided we wanted to have some place where we could hang out because the club that serviced the whole base there, it was quite a walk away. So we got together and decided this one area in this building would be a nice place and it ended up being two hooches that we got rid of and turned into a club. We put a bar in there, a nice bar, good sound system and lots of posters, lots of girl posters and stuff. And that's where we had our interactions after flights and told war stories and made up stuff, you know? And so this one night, this gentleman came in. Somewhere he had acquired this Tommy gun. I don't know if he'd just gotten it that day, I don't remember that part of it. But before he could even get it out of his hands to pass it around so everybody else could see it, it had a hair trigger of some kind on it and that thing started letting loose. And all of us were hitting the ground. And this guy, it just went all over. He unloaded the whole gun and never touched anybody in the hooch. And there would've been another hooch behind us, the club, and then one on either side and nobody got injured. And as far as I know, nothing ever even got reported on it. It never happened. It was probably a story that no one ever knew about unless you were in there. There were some holes in the roof, I'm sure, that probably got patched up by some locals. But it was exciting.

Interviewer

You changed your ways? Why?

David Barber

Well, I liked Kahlua and milk too much. And so when I was going to the club, which was very close–this was in Can Tho–and the club was like a hundred feet away, probably. And so go down there and that's where the bands were and that's where the drinking was going on and that kind of thing. And so I got to drinking these Kahlua and milks and at some point in time I said, "man, this is getting to the point that it's not something that I should be doing." So I just got up and walked out to the education center, that particular night, I guess, you know? Because they were giving classes at night there. And I enrolled right then and ended up taking a couple of courses before I left.

Interviewer

Was there a lot of drugs going on with American personnel there?

David Barber

Yeah. What I witnessed anyway, was just basically marijuana. You could find these glass or porcelain elephants over there that were probably 18-inches high and maybe eight-inches wide. And they had a flat surface on the top that looked like a saddle. A lot of guys were sending these things home in their whole baggage or whatever like that. And I found out at some point in time that that was the method of getting drugs from Vietnam back home for the guys who got addicted. I saw just a lot of pot smoking. That was about it. When I went through as a duty officer at night in the hooches, you'd smell and you'd see it. There was some prostitution going on too. I mean it was just the way of war, I guess you want to call it that. And if it was somebody I knew maybe I'd be more lenient. Everything, you just evaluate it for what's happening at the time. Is it worth bringing up a problem or not or look the other way? If they were good soldiers during the day and doing their job that's one thing - if they were drug addicts and couldn't do their job then it's something else. But yeah, it was there.

Interviewer

If you had resigned, they wouldn't have sent you over to the rotor school, they were going to send you right to infantry?

David Barber

Anybody who failed out of the program - you got three pink slips you're gone. No second chances and you went 11-bravo. You became an infantry-enlisted man at that point in time.

Interviewer

That was a big change in your life, if that guy had let you resign?

David Barber

Oh, yes, tremendous. Tremendous. Yeah, I'd not have had a military career, probably. I'd probably gone over there and got shot. Another thing I can tell you first hand through spiritual enlightenment and I'll use that term–I was selected for fixed wing by a higher power and happened to be there at that time when I got selected. Somewhere after Vietnam, I got a vision--I don't want to use "vision"–it's just telepathic or something like this, that I was sent over there as an airplane pilot because if I'd gone as a helicopter pilot I would not have survived. And for whatever reason I was to survive and come back. But yeah, I totally believe that. Wholeheartedly. And I can't explain the communications the way it happens, but I truly believe it and that was the reason I went to airplanes. And I got helicopters later anyway. It was mandatory. If you were a warrant officer in the Army you got to be helicopter qualified. The airplane program shut down four classes after me, initial entry, fixed wing. And so it ceased to exist, no longer exists. There's very few airplanes in the army today and it's just a very small program. So you got to be helicopter qualified and I know people who could not make that transition from airplanes to helicopters. They were so adamant about staying fixed wing that they purposely failed to finish the program and they were forced out because they didn't want to change. I enjoyed it. I wanted to fly helicopters all along in my life. It was fun. I had a great time.