



Richard Carter
US Air Force
Santaquin, Utah
"Escalation"

Interviewer

How did you get into the service and what the atmosphere was like and what your thoughts were.

Dick Carter

Sure. I'll take you back to 1950. I came home from my job one weekend and I was called by one of my friends that we were number one, two, and three on the draft board. So I went over to Spanish Fork, which was our draft board, talked to the people and for sure they had our names down to be calling us the next week. And I said,

"Well, what can I do? I really don't want to be going into the Army."

She said, "Well, you can go into the National Guard, you can go into the service of your choice, or you can go to college and join the ROTC program, Reserve Officer Training Corps, get your degree and keep your grades up and we'll exempt you."

So that's what I did. I went to the University of Utah for four years during the ROTC program and got my degree and got my commission. I qualified for the pilot training program but they had a waiting list because Korea was over. I didn't want to go to Korea, initially anyway. That's why I went there. But anyway I had to wait for nine months before I had the opportunity to go to flight school which was in Moultrie, Georgia. I spent six months there and went to Enid, Oklahoma, for six months for advance training and then to Randolph Air Force Base in Texas for advanced pilot training. First assignment was overseas to Tripoli, Libya. We spent three year in Tripoli, Libya, then we came right back to Georgia to the Strategic Air Command flying B-52s. I was an aircraft commander in the B-52s for seven and a half years.

Interviewer

Did you fly the B-52s, during the Cold War, loaded with nuclear weapons?

Dick Carter

We did. We did. We left Georgia in B-52s loaded for bare, nuclear weapons in the bomb bay, two missiles with nuclear weapons head on them. We flew up to Washington, went across the Atlantic to Spain, hit two tankers. One tanker I got 150,000 pounds off in one and 50,000 pounds off from another one. Went around the Mediterranean Sea, back to the Rock of Gibraltar, got 50,000 pounds of fuel at the Rock of Gibraltar in Spain, climbed up to 50,000 feet, came home. And went back to Georgia and landed. Total time between 24 and 25 hours flying time.

Sometimes they had an extra pilot on board, sometimes they didn't, sometimes the automatic pilot didn't work so

we had to hand fly the airplane for 24 to 25 hours.

Interviewer

How could you do that? Did you have time to sleep?

Dick Carter

It's not too bad. We have a navigator, radar navigator, one of them can come up and sit in the seat and you can go back and rest for a little while. It's not too bad. I don't think I rested one time because I was always listening. One time my co-pilot was flying it and the navigator was sitting in the co-pilot seat and I heard the engine going whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. So I recognized what was going on because the airspeed was too low and the air was coming through into the front of the engines but it wasn't going out, it was coming back and almost ready for a stall. So I grabbed him and says, "get out." And he got out and I got in the seat and told the crew I was going to take it off autopilot and I took it off autopilot and we dropped about 5,000 feet before I got control of it real good.

What happens when you lose airspeed, what's going on is the elevator in the rear of the aircraft would keep changing for the airspeed to give you more lift to a certain point. And then you got into an elevator stall and there's no way you can recover that thing once you get into a stall. At 50,000 feet the air up there is pretty thin. You can rotate the whole yoke, put your rudder clear opposite and you may be getting some change which took a long time to get the aircraft straightened out. And anyway, got the aircraft straightened out, airspeed back up, and continued our flight back up to 50,000 and came home. They just didn't pay attention. The assignment was the other navigator was supposed to watch the airspeed, too. The co-pilot and the navigator was too busy talking and once the airspeed gets going down he just misinterpreted the airspeed till it got too low. And we flew those missions, Cold War, it seemed like it lasted quite a while, but we had an aircraft in the air at all times with six nuclear weapons on board; all programmed.

Interviewer

If the plane had crashed, would those bombs detonate? Or did they have to be activated before?

Dick Carter

No. They would not detonate; they would have been down in the Atlantic Ocean somewhere with the airplane. No way.

Interviewer

How big of a crew did you have on board?

Dick Carter

We had a crew of six: aircraft commander, co-pilot, radar navigator, navigator, electronic warfare officer. And we flew a Delta model airplane which had a big tail and we had a gunner. That aircraft came into service in 1952 and they're still flying it. But not that particular model, they're flying an H model which has large fan jet engines and they've eliminated the gunner in the rear and, much better airplane. Aircraft was okay. I don't want to say anything too much about the strategic air command, but I really didn't like it too good.

Interviewer

When did you first hear about the Vietnam War and how did you get into that?

Dick Carter

Well, in the '60s when the Vietnam started up, I didn't pay too much attention to it. We were just involved. We had a few exercises but we weren't called upon it and the latter part of '66 I'd say, oh, December, November, our wing went to Guam and that's where we entered the Vietnam War with our B-52s. We were there for six months and we flew from Guam and we took off in Guam to Phan Rang, Vietnam, wherever we were supposed to drop our bombs. And then we climbed back up to 50,000 feet after releasing our bombs and came home. The interesting thing was that in Guam you have a runway that, it has a 500 foot drop off one end and we almost always took off in that particular direction with the prevailing winds and right off the end of the runway there was a troller out there, a boat, and they radioed the Vietnamese command and told them we were on our way to a target. We generally flew ships of-I was in a flight of six originally, 12 airplanes at a time. And the winds got so bad sometimes on landing when we came back that they wouldn't let the co-pilots land and my co-pilot was as good a pilot as I was so we just took turns. Takeoffs were something sometimes because when we have some torrential storms come through and winds, and the aircraft was designed to-you could just pick up a stick and turn the nose 45 degrees into the wind and you'd be going straight ahead, but the aircraft would be pointing into the wind.

One time on takeoff we set the flaps at 20 degrees for lift because the runway was quite short and we wanted to get a lift as soon as possible. This one particular time we had one of those kind of storms. I was the number two aircraft on the takeoff. Everything was silenced. You took off when your time was right and when the other aircraft had left, a minute after he had taken off, we took off. Roaring down the runway, we're timed when we take off because we meet at a certain point, our airspeed should be at a certain point. With the flaps down our airspeed at that particular point should be just a little bit lower. At this particular takeoff they were a little bit high so I looked over there and the flaps were not down. So I reached over and slapped them down and told the co-pilot to stop them at 20 degrees and the next thing I knew we were over that cliff. Of course you just watch your airspeed and when the airspeed is built up enough, you pull out and start your climb.

Interviewer

And they were the same that you flew for SAC? They all had the 8 engines?

Dick Carter

Uh-huh.

Interviewer

When you were first assigned to Vietnam, what were your targets in the B-52s?

Dick Carter

It was mass dropping of bombs in particular areas. Probably generally troops that were supposed to have been in contact. A lot of different targets they had.

Interviewer

Did you bomb the Ho Chi Minh trail?

Dick Carter

I'm sure they put a lot of holes in there. Yeah.

Interviewer

Any targets on military installations in North Vietnam?

Dick Carter

I say it's a Vietnam War, okay? One of the peeves, that we as pilots had, not only in the B-52, but later flying the B-57, which is a fighter bomber, is that we basically had our hands tied behind us. We had to get permission to do anything. We knew all the weapons and everything was coming from Ha Noi and North Vietnam and we could not go into North Vietnam. In fact, I was on the first B-52 that went into North Vietnam and that's the only mission I went into Vietnam on was that one particular flight and then my time was up and we came home. But we carried different weapons in the B-52. Sometimes we carried canisters filled with little explosives, looked like a five gallon old honey can, I used to call it, square that had about, oh I don't know, hundreds of those in there. And we generally would fly in one of the aircrafts would fly in low first in there and drop those and anything down there, any person down there, would get hit with one of those after they went off in the air, 500 feet to 1,000 feet above the ground and a pretty good missile coming at you.

And different other weapons, mostly we carried 750-pound bombs outside under the wings and inside in the bomb bay. So we had quite an arsenal of bombs, mostly saturation trails, enemy dispositions, and so forth.

Interviewer

Did you ever get fired upon by Russian MiGs or anti-aircraft guns?

Dick Carter

No, we were too high for the anti-aircraft guns and for the other kind of guns. Actually it was quite a peace run. The only thing we had any worries about in that particular aircraft was the weather. One particular time on one mission we had just taken an aircraft off of maintenance, they had it in and took care of all the maintenance, and I flew over to Vietnam and was on my way back up to 50,000 feet and I had two of the engines shut off real fast on the right side, the inside pod, and then one of them on the outside pod started coughing. Well when that happened, I immediately hit the emergency anti-icing because I figured that's what it was and I dropped my nose and started descending to see if I could light those other engines. I had to go down, over the Atlantic, I had to go down to about 18,000 feet before I could get one of them lit. Finally I got that outside one lit, which was the most important. It lit and the other two I couldn't get them back on the line.

Interviewer

They were the two pods together?

Dick Carter

Well on each wing you had out here, you had two pods out here and you had two engines on the inside and two further out on the wing. And the two on the inside I couldn't get them re-lit and the one out here I finally got it back online so I climbed back on up to about 28,000 feet and watched it closely. It was probably about 24,000 feet. And had a tanker come out from Okinawa. I couldn't have made it back with the fuel I had on board, to Guam, if I hadn't received some more fuel. So that came out, hooked up to me and got some gas and went ahead and came back and landed. In checking that airplane over in their maintenance and they had not hooked up the anti-icing equipment on the engines, so had I continued on that climb and not corrected it, hit the emergency switch or gone back down to altitude, I would have probably lost all those engines real fast. Little things like that happen but we're trained to take care of them.

Interviewer

How long were the missions?

Dick Carter

12 hours. Six over, six back.

Interviewer

Okinawa or Guam?

Dick Carter

No, Guam.

Interviewer

Do you have to refuel every time?

Dick Carter

Oh yeah. Every time we went over, a KC-135 from Okinawa came out and gave us a little bit of gas and then we continued over.

Interviewer

How high were you when you bombed?

Dick Carter

We could be as low as 15,000 feet to about 30. We normally liked to stay around 28,000 feet.

Interviewer

So you could bomb pretty accurately at 28,000 feet?

Dick Carter

Oh yeah, the radar has available to pinpoint its target and the altitude, everything is figured in. They could put those bombs on the top of a chicken coop if it was out there.

Interviewer

How many missions did you fly over Vietnam?

Dick Carter

The B-52 I flew 47 missions on it. You multiply that by 12 and you find out how many hours. It was good, it was a good airplane. It was a good six months in Vietnam. We enjoyed it. We didn't have to worry. The only thing we worried about is we didn't worry about getting hit. We had some MiGs come up behind us at one time and the gunner fired a few rounds at them and they just left. We had no problem with enemy aircraft.

Interviewer

And when you flew over, how many aircraft did you say left --

Dick Carter

We generally went on a flight of six or twelve.

Interviewer

Did any other planes crash?

Dick Carter

Not when I was flying. Later on our wing went back over there and they were flying some northern missions at that time and one of them had to make an emergency landing. He landed at Da Nang and the runway was a little shorter than he wanted. He threw out his parachute. Normally when you land the aircraft's going a fairly good speed and we generally throw out a parachute in the back out of the back and it slows you up before you hit your brakes to stop it. Anyway, he ran off the runway, caught fire, exploded and killed everybody on board. So we lost one aircraft. Going to the target you had a point where you all sort of joined up and got in line and during that particular line you're sitting about a mile behind and under trying to get positioned and one of the aircrafts flew into the other one. And we lost a good general. He was on board just observing and we lost a good general in that one. That was the only two aircraft I remember losing in the Vietnam War in B-52s.

Interviewer

So you never got on the ground at Vietnam.

Dick Carter

No, thank you.

Interviewer

And then after this B-52 did you go to Okinawa to fly B-57s?

Dick Carter

No. What happened then is we came back to my station in Georgia and we were there for only about a month and I received the message sending me to the Philippine Islands to fly the B-57. That was the aircraft we flew just before we came into Guam, I mean to fly the B-52 originally. We flew the B-57 in Tripoli, Libya. We were towing targets with that over there in Tripoli for the fighters and so I got this message sending me to the Philippines to Clark Airbase in the Philippines. I called them up and I said, "What have you got flying on your base?" They said,

"We have two squadrons of B-57s." I said,

"Oh, okay." I said, "I'll see you in a week."

They gave me two weeks to get from my home in Georgia to the Philippines. We sold our house I think the first day I put it in the paper. As a Christmas bonus and I took my wife and family to Salt Lake City, located them in an apartment and I took off. They had lost some aircraft, some B-57s in combat, and they wanted somebody that had had knowledge of the aircraft, and the Air Force has a history of which airplanes you have flown and so mine came out of the hopper and two weeks later I was over in Tripoli.

Interviewer

The Philippines.

Dick Carter

The Philippines. Sorry about that. Sorry about that. I'm getting older, you know?

Interviewer

So your missions were to fly from Vietnam from the Philippines, is that correct?

Dick Carter

No, that's not correct. We had two squadrons. One squadron would be in Phan Rang, Vietnam, stationed in Phan Rang, Vietnam for two months. The other squadron would be back at Clark Air Base checking out new pilots and taking it easy and whatever and then we flip flopped every two months and took our turn over there. Vietnam War, for me, was, I enjoyed it. I didn't like what was going on because we had no control. I could see the enemy on one side of the road, I could see the friendlies on the other side of the road, and I could not go attack the enemy that they're coming together because I had no clearance. You had to get on the radio, call headquarters in Saigon, they would call an airborne airplane, he would come over there and say,

"Oh by gosh there are some bad guys here, some good guys here," then I could go in and hit them. By that time they're mixing it up. But that's a problem. We had no control. We couldn't fly into North Vietnam and hit the enemy where they kept the weapons and things and so we had to do whatever we were told and hit targets that we were told.

Interviewer

And get permission if you saw a target.

Dick Carter

You had to get permission at all times.

Interviewer

So how many missions did you fly in a B-57 in Vietnam?

Dick Carter

I flew 223 missions in the time I was over there, going back and forth for about two years. Total I flew the B-57 and B-52 total, I flew about a thousand and four hundred hours in combat.

Interviewer

How did those B-57s differ from your missions in a B-52?

Dick Carter

Oh, B-52s, altitude was high, you dropped your bomb. B-57 you were a fighter. You fighter bomb and the airplane I was flying had four 20-millimeter cannons, guns on it. It had a bomb bay where we carried all different kinds of bombs. The wings were little fat wings. I have a picture of it here I can show you. Little fat wings and we normally would perch about 8,000 feet above the ground. Our normal assignment was we were on alert, we had certain pilots that were on alert and the other pilots would be assigned to fly different missions in southern Vietnam, South Vietnam. And then at night we had about four aircraft that flew when it got dark. We would fly about every hour; one of us would take off and fly up North Vietnam. We would go up to Mu Gia trail. They had three roads coming out of Vietnam and it depended on the season which road the Viet Cong would come down and they would be coming down in trucks, carrying weapons or whatever, going south to refurbish their people down south.

Our call sign was called Yellow Bird. So Yellow Bird was to go up there, get on one of those trails and perch about 8,000 feet, fly back and forth across that road until we saw an enemy truck on the road. Our weapons inside of the aircraft were very, very, very highly volatile. They were canisters about this big around and about eight feet long and we had four of those in the bomb bay and we dropped those out in a dive from 8,000 feet, we dive down, about 4,000 feet, we would kick them out one at a time and it would go on, continue on down to about 2,000 feet and it would open up and the slip stream, the propeller, was on that bomb and it would open up the canister and all that material - very highly volatile material - would come out in the slip stream. And inside of that bomb and that mixture there was about 100 bomblets inside of it with white phosphorus and they would explode and spread that out, and it would cover a football field, minus about 10 yards. So you'd have about 90 yards' worth of fire coming down and it would burn through steel. It was very hot stuff. And that's what we did in this dive at night.

Underneath the wings we carried two 750-pound bombs underneath each wing. We had some flares. We had two pods of flares that carried about 12 flares in each pod that if we wanted to we could zip down and flare that area and make sure what it was. But at nighttime, we was always at night, and if there's anything down there they generally had a little light on or something that you could see. I flew 48 missions in North Vietnam under those circumstances and I always come back with a good target. And, in fact, one of the missions I flew I took off at about three o'clock in the morning and I flew up the path, found the road I wanted, and I was going-the reason you went back and forth and let the aircraft just sort of climb by itself was you don't want to go straight and level. You go straight and level for a few seconds and they have these nice 37-millimeter cannons down here all over and if you flew straight and level, their radar would pick you up and they could knock you down. But anyway this particular night I was flying along that road and we run into clouds so I couldn't see the road anymore so we went around this cloud and picked up the road again. I have another pilot-he's not a pilot, a navigator, in the back seat just for navigation and conversation and helping out.

But anyway, came back on the road and then we went out to finish that and we came back. We did this three times

and couldn't see anything. I said, well, let's drop below, let's go underneath that cloud layer and see what we got. So I asked Jim, I says what's the highest elevation here in these mountains and so he gave me the elevation. I said,

"Well, I'll level off a thousand feet above that and see if we can see anything."

So I came down through the clouds, leveled off, right there in front of me I saw a light on the tail end of a truck and the light on the front of a truck. And so I just picked the aircraft back up and flew it over and come back out and put a bomb right on the truck that was leading, going south. And then I come off and recovered. Well what happens about this bomb I've dropped and all that flame is out there, it's lit up the whole area like a Christmas tree. It really lights up and you're recovering about the same time that's going off. So you're silhouetted and they can see you and so they, they're nice friends, they start shooting at you. So I pick it up again, come over and come down again and stick one of those out on the tail end of the truck coming down, and I pull off. And when I pulled off from that time I had about six of those guns firing at me. And just twisted and turned and came down the other way again and I put four-the last two bombs-right in the center of what was going on on the ground. You talk about Fourth of July, you had those trucks. There were 12 of them down there in this turn. It was gasoline, they were getting their gasoline on this POL area where they were getting their gas. And gas was running down the mountain and these trucks were waiting their turns to get their gas. Explosions going up to 2,000 feet from those trucks and Fourth of July. Anyway I put those two in there, came back up again, swung down and I set those four bombs, high explosive bombs that were on the wings, for minimum intervals and dropped them right in all that mess and I threw the calls the aircraft 100 percent and I could see the mountain silhouette down there and we just went right down through these mountains. And I wasn't supposed to do that.

You know you made these turns and things so they wouldn't, so those guns wouldn't lock on you. So while I was going down through those mountains I stick it on his tail to climb and get out of there. And about 8,000 feet, 9,000 feet, all these guns were coming up at me. I don't know how many there was, I figured there was about 12 guns around that POL area. And it sounded like popcorn going off. And you could see the firepower coming at you. It looked like beer cans in a straight line coming up at you and you just turned inside of it so it would pass on and then you racked it over and it's coming this way and I kept doing this dance. And all of the sudden I heard wham, something hit me. So I got hit. So I just kept pulling until-I'm stalling out about 14,000 feet and I picked it over. And we're still flying so I slowed the aircraft up, checked everything over. The engines all looked good and I did a few maneuvers to see how the aircraft--everything seemed to be performing okay. And we came down over across the demilitarized zone and we landed at a little Marine base down there called Chu Lai and I left my flaps up because I didn't know if I was hit, where I was hit. And landed and taxied in and shut down the engines, opened the canopy, stepped out on the wing and right behind the canopy about this far from the little navigator's head back there, that 37-millimeter shell had hit the top of the aircraft and tore off a piece of the top of the fuselage about four feet wide and probably eight feet long it tore it out. It didn't disrupt the flying at all but it just--had it been a little bit lower all the

cables for the rudder and the elevator is running right along there and, of course, it probably would have been inside the cockpit if it had been just a little bit lower. Anyway, landed and good mission. Got a lot of damage out of it.

Interviewer

What did you enjoy the most, flying B-52s or B-57s?

Dick Carter

You ask any pilot if he likes to fly a fighter or a bomber and he'll always tell you, I'd rather fly a fighter. You can dive bomb, you can go in and fire people on the ground with your guns. You can fire rockets at 'em. We always carried rockets on the aircraft and we carried napalm on there, too, during the daytime missions. It was fun for a pilot. I enjoyed that very good.

Interviewer

Did you have any other close calls in the B-57s?

Dick Carter

Yeah, I had one but it really didn't amount to too much. I got hit again underneath the aircraft but it wasn't from a big gun, it was from the smaller guns. What was fun was the missions we flew in South Vietnam, we'd go in on a target and they'd be shooting at us and you could see where their fire was coming from. You could just roll over and drop a bomb on them. It got so bad when they had so many guns firing at us that we'd fly two airplanes. One would be at a lower altitude, say 8,000 feet, and another one would be perched a couple thousand feet above him and this guy, we'd roll in here and they start firing at him and there'd be a couple of guns firing at him when it's coming down and this guy up here would just pick out one of those guns and he'd come in on him. So we was knocking out all-- there's 37-millimeter guns. We got quite a few of them.

Interviewer

Were there quite a few B-57s that got shot down?

Dick Carter

We all lived in one little area there, all the pilots, and we had it made because we had a nice trailer that we could live in. One pilot on one side and one pilot on the other side and I lost two of them that was in the other side of me and one of those was lost on takeoff. We takeoff between two hills and during weather we had to take off and then come around climbing, until we hit a radio beacon so we could pick up this heading, so we could fly between those hills and go on out. One of them came around and he wasn't quite high enough before he hit this beacon and he run in through the top of an aircraft. We lost a lot of pilots. We lost one on landing. They told us, "Save your touch-and-goes for landings for the ground during the daytime and don't mess around at night." And one guy came around and wanted to make a touch-and-go at night and lost an engine and run right into a fuel area, big explosion. So we lost a few not being shot down for aircraft. I had a wingman one time that we were on a target and he wasn't as familiar with the aircraft. Normally when we would fly into a target we flew nice and steep, a

gun target on the ground, we were nice and steep and then we pull off and come off gently on a--we call it a clover leaf, we'd come up and turn it over and come back again and tell the other pilot we're off right or off left.

Chuck Yeager flew with me two missions where we flew together and we had a lot of fun. But this friend of mine, and he was a good friend, we played cards together and so forth and he worked in the command post. It was his last flight. But we received these pilots, we trained them how to fly downwind, crosswind, and come in and fire on the target, about a 30-degree bank coming down and they pull off and turn. Well that's all they did. They didn't learn how to come up and turn the aircraft over and come in steep. Well, I watched him come off, coming out, and those guys on the ground said well here comes that crazy pilot again, let's get him on this turn. So he started coming off the target and they got all their guns ready and fired. Next thing they hit him on the wing and he was rolling over and killed him and the guy in the back. A lot of things like this happened but I'd say the reason I came over there is they had just lost two pilots and they'd been shot down.

Interviewer

Those B-57s sound a lot more dangerous than the B-52s.

Dick Carter

Yeah. They mass destruction. They can throw out a lot of bombs but we had close destruction with our B-57s. The major aircraft that were flying alongside of us up there was F-4 Phantoms and they normally perched higher and they didn't roll rookie the roads. When they come in on the target, their angle was shallower but we could perch lower and we could get out of there faster. Whenever they had some troops in contact, when we were on alert they had troops in contact, they would call. We could be airborne and get over there and get in and drop our bombs and use our guns very quick to help out. And we had about the best bomb damage assessment, target damage, than any aircraft in Vietnam. It was a good airplane.

Interviewer

A lot of pilot error going on over there, too, I guess?

Dick Carter

Well, you're flying at night. One flight I flew up North Vietnam and I was supposed to hit an aircraft that dropped flares on this one particular area. They had a lot of trucks coming on this one particular road and they wanted to saturate that road. So I came down underneath his flares and when I bottomed out, I went to recover, my seat went wham, right down to the bottom. So here I was trying to recover at night underneath those flares and you can get disorientated very quickly and you're real low to the ground, and yeah, disorientation.

Interviewer

So when did you leave Vietnam?

Dick Carter

'68.

Interviewer

You made a career out of the service? Did you stay in the service quite a while after that?

Dick Carter

I was in the service for 20 years and then got out.

Interviewer

How were you treated when people knew you were a Vietnam veteran? Did you have any ill feelings towards you because you were a Vietnam vet?

Dick Carter

They never welcomed you home. They never said good job. They bad-mouthed, not particularly me personally, but I knew of a lot of people that were bad-mouthed. But myself personally, I guess during that time I was in the military I had my family with me so I was happy. Even when I went to war in Vietnam, I was a Major at the time so I was able to bring my family to the Philippines. And so when I come back for those two months that I was back in the Philippines, we would normally go to Bangkok or we'd go to Japan or go to these places for rest and recuperation and get acquainted again. So that was a good part of it. But I know what you're talking about. Everybody didn't like Lyndon Johnson because he just kept pushing people over, more and more and more people over to Vietnam and let's tie your hands behind your back first, you know, and then go out and fight. The people on the ground, the forces on the ground, I was able to go in when there was friendlies and enemy fighting and I was able to go in and hit them and I could see what was going on on the ground several times. And I know in the jungles and where they were going through and so forth that it's just like the movies depict. It was not fun. When they finally opened up where we could go North Vietnam and fight and drop out bombs in North Vietnam, things were fine. But the French came in and fought the North Vietnamese a long time before we did and they weren't successful and here we're in there fighting with our hands tied behind us and so forth. And so we finally moved out of there and it wasn't a war, it was just, I think, a political situation.

Interviewer

Tell us more about the story where you're under the flares at night and your seat goes down. How did you fix your situation.

Dick Carter

Very busy. I'm sitting down here like this and recovering and you have to--first of all, we're trained really, really good in night flying. We're trained very good before we ever go fly night missions because if you fly in an airplane - I don't know if you've been flying in a commercial airplane when the lights are all on inside there and you're flying over cities and you see all these lights outside, there's a sense of calmness. You have all kinds of reference. But take that same situation and fly out over the water at night where there's no lights at all and you have no references. It's a different story. You rely on your cockpit, you rely on your instruments in your aircraft, and you learn how to control yourself by those instruments in your aircraft. And so going underneath those flares--we didn't do that very often because we carried our own flares. But when they had a major spot, we could see the ground, we could line up on

the road visually and you could pinpoint your bombs on that ground. This particular time when I lost, for a few minutes, what was going on 'cause I could see the ground where the flare was and then when recovering I had to transition to my instruments. All I had to do was believe in what I was seeing. I could still see my flight indicator and how my aircraft was and I could still turn and so forth. But it's just a momentarily shock getting control on it. On that way.

Interviewer

How long did you fly B-52 missions?

Dick Carter

Oh. We hit the pre-IP out over the water, we coasted into land, we probably made one turn, held out and rolled out and held that turn until we got on our target, dropped our bombs and we were out. Sometimes that took about probably 20 minutes and everything was all through.

Interviewer

It would take you 12 hours, though, right?

Dick Carter

Yeah. It took you six hours to get over there and six hours to get back, minus 20 minutes.

Interviewer

Twenty minutes of actual combat?

Dick Carter

Yeah.

Interviewer

And you had to re-fuel once every time?

Dick Carter

That's true. Going.

Interviewer

How did they re-fuel you?

Dick Carter

We just picked up the tanker and we just flew in underneath him and he spiked the probe down in your fueling outlet there and you just kept with him until he got your gas. And you went on.

Interviewer

When I think of B-52s I think of big bombs, lots of noise. Do you hear or feel or see any of that from your perspective as the pilot?

Dick Carter

No. Normally once we drop our weapons we generally are turning and getting out of there. Turning and getting out of there. So you're up there at 20-some-odd thousand feet, you're not hearing anything. Now in the B-57 you're

hearing things 'cause it's right under your nose and when they're firing at you when you're on a dive pass and you've got those bullets coming right up in your cockpit and you're diving right into those bullets. The adrenaline is working pretty hard. But other than that, we dropped some bombs, which those bombs in the B-57, on little towns and areas. We had some bombs that opened up with fins on them and they came down like parachutes. Slow. You'd get really low on those and drop 'em. If there was a house or a building there and they felt it was an area where they had a command post or something we could drop those bombs and we could pull off and we could watch them come right into the building and explode. So there's all kinds of different weapons that we carried which was very effective.

Interviewer

What's your attitude these days about the Vietnam War?

Dick Carter

Well, I have the same attitude I have in Iraq and Afghanistan and I think that we should never have gone in. That's my personal viewpoint. Never should have gone into Iraq. We should have let them handle their own problem. Afghanistan, this idea between communism and freedom and so forth, I would not like to be a president and have to go into a country and try and save the people from communism and because it always seems to turn out where if you don't let the people take over themselves or whatever, they normally they can. During history you can find that if there's a bad man at power, after a while they'll generally get him out of there by a coup or some way other than someone else coming in and trying to get him out of there.

We were all happy when we went into Iraq because we thought they had nuclear weapon capability they were building. We found out that, really, maybe it was there, maybe it wasn't. The consensus was it wasn't there. So it wasn't a happy situation. In Vietnam the same thing; you have the Viet Cong, you had the Communist China controlling their side of it, coming down to take and force the South Vietnamese into their way of life. So we stepped in to help them. The French stepped in to help them, too.

Finally, after everything settled down and we moved out of there. Now South Vietnam and North Vietnam are living together and growing together. And it just takes time to handle their own affairs. Anyway, I bet you get a different story when you talk to some of these people on the ground.

Interviewer

Tell me how the military attitude was evolving or changing during that early period versus '68 on.

Dick Carter

You're probably talking to the wrong person about the attitude of the war changing right into there because I was happy just living my life and what I was doing. And the assignment I received coming back, I was teaching fighter tactics in Florida; I was teaching pilots how to fly, how to dive bomb, how to strafe, and how to do all these tactics, the ones that are going over to Vietnam. So I really didn't notice any change in what was going on. I knew that the war was continuing and so I didn't pay that much attention to it because I was happy doing what I was doing. And

then it quit. And it was over with.

Interviewer

Can you describe the biggest bombs that the B-52s dropped?

Dick Carter

Well the biggest one that we dropped were a thousand pounders, but I don't think we used thousand-pound bombs because the configuration of the aircraft and putting them on the pods that held them-the 750-pound bomb fit just perfect and the bomb bays fit-you could get so many of these in there. And it was an anti-personnel bomb and I don't think the different size, whether it was 750-pound bomb or a thousand-pound bomb, would have made any difference at all. Any difference at all.

Interviewer

Well a B-52 drops bombs on roads, wherever, what kind of damage does that do?

Dick Carter

Well, there was a lot of bombs coming down there. You take 12 airplanes dropping 35 bombs at a time coming down in one area, it's going to destroy everything there on the ground. Anybody that's down there, they're going to be destroyed, whether it's a jungle or whether it's a road or whether it's a town or whatever it is; it's going to be destroyed. I saw the aircraft in front of me drop their bombs and it's just a whole bunch of bombs coming down. They're not coming down all together, they're going down in a stream and so each one of those aircraft is covering a certain swath of ground down there, but when they get through there's not much left underneath them. They're not going to farm that ground for a little while because of all the holes. Whereas you take a little aircraft like that B-57 and you come down and you drop one of those bombs that I dropped, just one of those bombs, and a football field is covering about the same area as that B-52 covered all at once. So you can get some good pinpoint bombing. Depends on what the commanders, what they want, and so forth.

Interviewer

I understand you got a Silver Star for flying a B-57.

Dick Carter

Yeah. Can I show you something here? This is a little plaque I have here. Can you see that? Okay, this was made to commemorate for the B-57s flying during the war. Our targets were all at night. This is to commemorate the aircrews that flew at night into North Vietnam and fly into the Valley of Death. And they call it the Canberra Night Flyers and flying into the Doom Pussy which is flying into the-we flew into the jaws of the cat, which is what it says around here, we flew into the jaws of the cat. And I was able to have some very successful missions.

I did receive the Silver Star on that one particular mission I was telling you about. The damage I incurred on that particular mission was a POL area, re-fueling area, 12 trucks, all the bodies involved there and all the weapons and things that were on those trucks. The main thing was I got hit. I got hit and my aircraft got hit. But I got a Silver Star for that and I got a Distinguished Flying Cross on another mission that was similar to that. And yeah, 18 air medals.

So it was a good war for me, I enjoyed it. As long as you can come back and land, why it was a good mission. If you didn't have to bail out. The pilot that lives right across the street from me, he got shot down. I lost some very good friends and it was a loss losing your friends from enemy fire. But I didn't have the opportunity to dogfight another aircraft in the sky because I'm sure they would have shot me down very quickly because I'm a little larger than they are unless I saw them first.

But the Vietnam War was a tragedy and now that we have peace with the Russians and there is no more communism. You take the freedom they have over in Russia now, you know, it would be a good place to live because they getting everything that we have now. I'm looking at different areas now that I don't think in the future, if things change, I hope it doesn't turn into a bad situation. But I'd be happy to answer any more questions.

Interviewer

Thank you for coming in. I appreciate it.