

basic training. I enlisted in the Air Force and I was accepted into the Aviation Cadet program, so I did my training at Harlingen AFB, at Harlingen, Texas where at the same time I got my commission and my wings. So, it was navigator training along with a commissioning program.

**Robards:** What aspects of your training did you use in Vietnam?

**Chalout:** I used just about every bit of it. There were some things that weren't covered that maybe we'll get into later on in this conversation. I think the training that I had probably prepared me quite well for the task that I was going to perform, but not all of it.

**Robards:** Do you think that military training changed you in any way?

**Robards:** What was your job description or occupation code?

**Chaloult:** My job description was a navigator bombardier on a B57 aircraft, which is an attack bomber, and the AFSC at that time was a 1525.

**Robards:** Did you volunteer to go to Vietnam?

**Chaloult:** No, I didn't.

**Robards:** How did you feel when you learned you were going to Vietnam?

**Chaloult:** I was quite excited. It was an interesting notification. If we have time, I can get into that a little bit. I was visiting my parents in Fort Lauderdale, Florida over the Christmas holidays in 1964. My wife and I had a 6 month old son and we were enjoying the holidays with my parents there in Florida. We left shortly after New Years, and I was going to stop and visit an old high school buddy of mine who was stationed in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. When we arrived at his house, his wife informed me that she had had a call from my Ops [Operations] officer, and that I was to call immediately. So I did, and he informed me that they had permanent change of station orders for me. He couldn't reveal any other information at that time, but he told me that I would be going bearing an airplane, which meant that we were going to take something somewhere. I was told to hurry back. I was stationed at Biggs Air Force Base at El Paso, Texas at that time and he [Ops officer] said I was to hurry back as soon as possible, because we would be leaving soon. So we did.

**Robards:** In what regions, towns or villages did you serve in Vietnam?

**Chaloult:** I was at Bien Hoa Air Base. I flew out of Tan Son Nhut Air Base and out of Da Nang Air Base.

**Robards:** What are the names of the units you were assigned to?

**Chaloult:** The whole time it was the 8<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron.

**Robards:** Describe your living conditions, housing and food in Vietnam.

**Chaloult:** Well, it varied at the three locations. At Bien Hoa we lived in I think they were 12 man hooches with central latrines and so forth. Food was provided at the Officer's Club in the Officer's dining hall.

At Tan Son Nhut we lived in an army BOQ which was located in down-town Saigon. The quarters weren't bad; it was getting to and from the quarters out to Tan Son Nhut Air Base that was the interesting part. If you were in Saigon in 1965, you had every means of transport traveling on the road from ox-carts to pedicabs to tanks and all kinds of vehicles. The trip to the base was almost as hazardous as the flight.

**Robards:**



to be overrun. The flare ship which relayed what the ground troops were saying said "go ahead and stream your bombs on the wire. That's where the enemy is and that's where we've got to get them and stop them."

Major Bien who was with the South Vietnamese Air Force. Good stick and rudder guy [although] marginal on instruments. They never trained with instruments, never had any need for them. If the weather was bad, they didn't go. But they were good; they did a good job of putting coordinates on the target, good at strafing, and napalm, and all the various tactics used.

**Robards:** What is your evaluation of American military leadership during the Vietnam War, and of your immediate commanders in the field?

**Chalout:** My immediate commanders were great. We had one guy for most of the time I was there. I can remember when he came in. Lieutenant Dan Far was his name. He gathered us all into the briefing room that we had there at Da Nang. One of the first things he said was, "Okay, I've never done this before in this environment." He had been in Korea, but he hadn't been in South Vietnam. So he said, "I want to fly one of every type mission that we are tasked to do, and I'll do it on somebody's wing. After that I'll lead everything. Until I get the feel of things, I'm gonna be a wing man." We went from there, and he was a great guy.

**Robards:** What medals or awards did you receive for serving in Vietnam?

**Chalout:** I got 2 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 10 Air Medals, Air Force Commendation Medal, Outstanding Unit award with two V [valor] devices, [Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palm](#), Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal. There was a bunch.

**Robards:** Do you think you understood the reason for the war when you were serving in Vietnam, and has your understanding of the reasons changed?

**Chalout:** Did I understand everything? No. I was a first Lieutenant. I did what I was told to do. I guess looking back at it and doing a lot of reading about it, it was a very complex political and military environment at that time—you know the domino theory we had and all these other high level things that affected the things that we did. I guess I was probably most affected and disturbed by the fact that things were controlled back in Washington D.C. by civilians rather than by the military commanders who were in the field and on the ground. There were incidents where...well, like we got in trouble one time for striking a power plant in North Vietnam that we were receiving ground fire from, [we got in trouble] because that power plant wasn't on the authorized target list. Someone back in the United States decided whether it was a viable target or not.

**Robards:** How did you feel about your military service in Vietnam when you left the country?

**Chalout:** When I left Vietnam to come back home? I was very proud of what I had done. I was very disappointed in the reaction that I got when I got back to the United States. We weren't very well...well in fact I was told that when we got back to California that we should change into civilian clothes before we went down to the San Francisco Airport, because if we were there in

uniform we would be subject to harassment. That's a little bit different from

no HF radios, so once you are out of line-of-sight communications, you couldn't talk to anybody, and Wake Island was 2000 miles away. We were cruise climbing up [so that we] would have enough gas to make it. That was one method, because as the airplane would get lighter as it burned off fuel, you could climb higher and use less fuel.

We got a call on guard from another aircraft who said, "Air Traffic Control has been looking for you guys because they hadn't heard from you." We said, "We can't talk to Air Traffic Control, because we don't have any HF radio. Just tell them that we are plugging along. We'll make it. By the way, where are you guys?" They had launched in a C130 from Hickam just about 15 minutes ahead of us. I said, "We should be close to you. We are at 47,000 feet and we are pulling contrails, so if you see us give us a shout." After a few minutes, they said, "Yeah, we've got contrails." I said, "Hey, we are going to do a turn to the right and then to the left so you can identify if that is us." We did, and they did. They said, "Looks like you are north of [the] course." I said, "Great. We are going to alter heading and get back down. Let us know when we are almost on track to go to Wake." So he did. I said, "Okay guys, see you on the ground. The beer is on me."

The whole trip and assignment was kind of an interesting experience, because the airplanes we were flying in the United States were electronic warfare aircraft. I was an electronic warfare officer. I was basic navigator by training, but I'd gone to Advanced Training to be an electronic warfare officer, as were all the other guys in the other nine crews. When we got to Kentucky to take the airplanes from the Guard, the guy that was handling the



and operated out of there for a short period of time, for about 6 weeks while they were moving the 105 outfit out of Da Nang over to Thailand, and then we took their place up at Da Nang.

**Robards:** Thank you, Colonel Chalout, for your service and dedication to our country and for participating in this exercise.

**Chalout:** It was a pleasure.

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