

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID H. PINSKY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

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Molly Graham: Just to get started, I have to say this is an interview with Dave Pinsky. Today's date is October 11, 2014. The interview is being conducted at his home in Santa Rosa, California, and the interviewer is Molly Graham. We will just start at the beginning. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

David H. Pinsky: I was born in Teaneck, New Jersey, at the Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck on December 22, 1939.

MG: What is Teaneck, New Jersey, like?

DP: It's a rather small town, not far from New York City. It's about four, five miles from the George Washington Bridge, which leads into New York City. It's a rather typical, small New Jersey/New England town. I have memories of streets with sidewalks on both sides and curbs and lots of trees, and I don't remember the exact population anymore. When I was growing up, I think it was about thirty-five or forty thousand, but it was also in an area, not far from the Hudson River, where there was town after town after town.

You couldn't tell when you left Ridgefield Park, which is where we first lived, into Teaneck, into Bergenfield, into Dumont, just one after another, but it was a nice town to grow up in. We talk today about how, in the summertime, we used to grab our bat, our ball, our mitt, say, "Bye, Mom." She'd say, "Be home for supper now." Of course, kids can't do that nowadays.

MG: Yes, it is a different world.

DP: Yes.

MG: Tell me a little bit about your family. Did you have siblings?

DP: I had a sister, about four years younger than me. She was a cheerleader in high school, graduated from the University of Michigan, then went to work for the United Nations in Belgium. Sadly, she died in an accident when she was in her mid-twenties.

MG: Oh, I am sorry. What about your parents? Where were they from and what did they do?

DP: That's interesting. My first cousins and I have spent a lot of time trying to re-create our history, because our grandkids get school assignments, "Tell us about your family," and I don't know much about my grandparents and my parents. I know that my mother and father were both born in this country. My father, I think, was born in New York City. My mother is kind of a mystery, because, apparently, she and her sisters were in foster homes for a while. I've learned all this from my last surviving aunt, who just died. So, I think my mother was born in Greenville, Mississippi, and my father in New York City. That's about all I know.

MG: Do you know how they met?

DP: My mother was in Denver, Colorado, along with her sisters. My father went on a trip to Denver, and I don't remember what he was doing at the time, but they met. He swept her off her feet and they married, and she relocated back to New Jersey with my father.

MG: I know they both worked. What did they do?

DP: My father did a lot of different things. My earliest memory, because that's what got me interested in aviation, was he and two of his brothers operated a newspaper/cigar/cigarette store in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, across from an airport. I used to watch the airplanes take off and land. They sold the store, best of my recollection.

When I was five, we moved to Denver. Before we moved to Denver, my father was co-owner of a silkscreen printing plant. They were the innovators of printing on bottles, like nail polish bottles, perfume bottles. We were doing very well; he was doing very well. Then, we moved to Denver, probably to be near my mother's family and my cousins. They were all out there.

In Denver, he was either the sole owner or part owner of a laundry/dry cleaning store. I can remember going down there on Saturdays and putting the paper and the little, round cardboard tubes on the hangers. Then, while he was out there, apparently, his partner in the silkscreen printing business didn't tend to the business very well. I'd be hard-pressed to say whether he did untoward things or not, because I don't know. All I know is that the business back East failed, and so, my father had to pick us all up and we moved back East. That's when we moved to Teaneck. So, when I was seven, we moved back to Teaneck.

MG: You lived near an airport then.

DP: No, oddly enough, it was when we lived in Ridgefield Park and my father and his brothers owned the newspaper/cigar/cigarette store right across the street from the train station in Ridgefield Park, which was across a body of water from Teterboro Airport, a pretty famous airport. I was a kid and I used to play out on the sidewalk. That was "day care" when your father or mother worked. I would see these airplanes taking off and landing all the time when I was five years old. That's where I first got interested in aviation. I had this little kid fascination about airplanes.

I remember, in grammar school in Teaneck, they would have these summertime reading contests, which kid could read the most books. I'd go down to the Teaneck Library, and I remember reading book after book after book about World War II airplanes and flying. That's where I got more interested in flying. Fast-forwarding, it was never a possibility for me, because we were not a wealthy family. My father struggled in those years. It wasn't until I went to Rutgers at Air Force ROTC that I saw an opportunity to get into aviation.

When we moved back to New Jersey, my father went through several jobs. I remember there being some tough times, but I don't have a clear memory of that. I know we lived in a garden apartment, which is like a tenement, really, for quite a while. It's still there. My friends, when I go back to my high school reunions, talk about when I lived in the garden apartments.

I think my father was a real estate salesman then. I have this memory of his being a real estate salesman, but, then, he changed jobs and he became a sales representative for a trucking company in Jersey City called All States Freight, which was bought out by PIE [Pacific Intermountain Express] Freight, and he did very well at that. He did extremely well. In fact, he was offered a regional sales manager job, but it would've required us moving to the Midwest somewhere. He turned it down, but that's what he did until the day he retired. He worked as a trucking company sales rep. He was good at that. He never met anybody who he didn't like or didn't like him. He was very good at that.

At that point, he was able to buy a home on Magnolia Road in Teaneck, New Jersey, 1122 Magnolia Road. That's where I spent my last year or two of grammar school, all of junior high, high school, and, when I came home from college, Rutgers, that's where I would go. Then, he did that job for the rest of his life, until--not for the rest of his life, for the rest of his working life. He smoked pretty heavily. He smoked Camel cigarettes, unfiltered Camel cigarettes. He retired due to emphysema. I guess he must've been in his late sixties. They tried to find someplace that the air was of a good quality, and they went to San Diego. They lived in San Diego until my father passed away in 1984.

MG: Did you know anyone who had served in World War II?

DP: Now or then?

MG: I guess I am wondering about then, but if it is now ...

DP: Well, then, one of my uncles did, but I only have a memory of seeing him in uniform and seeing pictures of him in uniform. I was pretty young, and I don't think we ever talked about World War II. Now, I know several people who fought in World War II, and I consider them my heroes.

MG: This was around when you really started loving cars and you joined the Hot Rod Club. Can you tell me about that?

DP: Well, my high school years were years probably not spent as well as they should have been, but my interest was in sports, cars and girls, in that order. [laughter] So, I played baseball most of my life. I loved baseball. I still love baseball. Tonight, I'll watch the San Francisco Giants play St. Louis for the pennant.

I got interested in cars. I'm not sure why; I just did. In Teaneck, there was the Rods and Customs Club of New Jersey. I started hanging around with those guys, much to my father's dismay. My junior and senior year in high school, I was pretty involved in custom cars, drag racing, while I tried to play baseball, football and basketball. I wasn't a star athlete. I was pretty good at baseball, medium good at football, not good at all at basketball, but I really enjoyed cars, custom cars, hot rods.

MG: What was your first car?

DP: My first car that I owned myself was a 1958 Chevy Impala.

MG: Where would you take that car? Would you go into the city? Would you go to the shore?

DP: The biggest thing we did was cruise the drag in Hackensack. Just like in the movie *American Graffiti*, we would cruise the drag Friday night and Saturday night. We'd roll the windows down and our hair would be slicked back. We would roll up our T-shirt sleeves and we'd cruise the drag. Then, when I got out of college, I took that car with me to my first Air Force assignment. [Editor's Note: *American Graffiti* is a 1973 film written and directed by George Lucas.]

MG: Talk to me about going to college. It seems like it was not something you expected to do.

DP: That's right. I never thought about college. My mother and father never--if they thought about college, they never mentioned it to me. I expected, when I graduated college, to become an automobile mechanic. That's what I thought I would do. When I was in high school, they still had courses like industrial arts, auto mechanics, mechanical drawing, and these were for kids who weren't on the college track. These were kids who were going to go into working world right away. So, I took them all, but, really, I took auto mechanics every year in high school.

The garden apartments where we lived before we moved to Magnolia Road was right next to two gas stations on Queen Anne Road in Teaneck, New Jersey. The Gulf station was within throwing distance of our apartment. So, I used to hang around there, at the Gulf station. I would do whatever I could do, for free. The owner there--I can see his face, but I can't think of his name--told me that if I wanted to work for him after I graduated high school that that'd be good, that I could do that.

So, I didn't take the College Boards, SATs. Somewhere in my senior year, my auto mechanics teacher--I'll remember him for the rest of my life, his name was Mr. Pasquini--he asked me what I was going to do when we graduated. I said, "I'm going to be an auto mechanic." He said, "Well," I don't remember exactly what he said, but, basically, he said, "You've got more potential than just being an auto mechanic. You need to go to college." I said I didn't know anything about applying to college, I'm sure that my folks didn't have the money.

He got with my English teacher, Mr. Church--what a character he was. I don't remember exactly how we completed my application for Rutgers, the State University, but we did. Then, I was told I had to take the SATs. This is very late in the game. This is almost spring of my senior year. Big-headed me, I didn't study, I didn't take any prep courses. In fact, I have a memory of, the Friday night before the SATs, going to Upstate New York, where you could drink when you were eighteen, and we all had forged driver's licenses. I think I took the SATs hungover. I'm not sure, but I think so, but, somehow, I did very, very well on the SATs.

I think Mr. Church knew some people down at Rutgers. I think they pulled some strings. Nonetheless, I got accepted, but I had to do it in a major field that was underpopulated, one that they wanted people in. So, I got accepted at Rutgers in the physics program. I knew nothing about physics. My father and mother had enough money to help me through my first year.

So, that was my story. In the fall, they drove me down to Rutgers and I went into the dorm--I can't remember which one it was--and I started my four years at Rutgers.

MG: Tell me about that. I know that registration was significant, because that is where you signed up for the ROTC.

DP: That is really a funny story, and it's true. Back then, freshman registration, you lined up in the auditorium at tables. There was no online registration or anything like that. I had no clue what I was doing, no clue, no advice from anybody. So, I'm in freshman registration line and I'm signing up for freshman math, all that kind of stuff. I remember when I got to the language, they said, "What language do you want to sign up for?" said, "Well, I took Spanish in high school." "Well, if you want to take Spanish and you had it in high school, then, you have to take a placement test." Well, I flunked it. So, I was going to have to start all over. So, I decided to take French--what a mistake that was--two years of French, never got better than a "D," never. All the rest of my grades were pretty good, but I never got better than a "D" in French.

So, I come to the end of the freshman registration line and there's three guys sitting there in uniform. One is Army khaki; I saw brown. One was in Navy blue; I saw blue. One was Air Force blue; I saw light blue. The first guy said to me, "What branch of ROTC do you want to sign up for?" I said, "What's ROTC?" He said, "Well, we're a land-grant college, and you are required to take two years of ROTC." My mind is going around and around, "What should I do?"

Typical of the immature thinking of a seventeen-year-old, when I thought about Army ROTC, I thought about digging foxholes and marching through the mud. When I looked at the Navy guy, I thought about being out on ships for long periods of time and getting seasick. So, I went to the Air Force guy and said, "I've always been fascinated with airplanes. If I join the Air Force ROTC, can I fly?" "Oh, yes, certainly you can." That's how it all started. I signed up for Air Force ROTC.

My major in physics lasted one month. I saw that physics was way beyond me, and I changed over to Business Administration. I took Air Force ROTC and really fell in love with it. After my first year, I had to work, both in the summer and while I was at college, because my folks had no money for college after the first year. So, I worked my way through my second, third and fourth years doing various jobs. I sold sandwiches, cake, milk and ice cream in the dorms. I worked at the Revlon plant in, I think, Piscataway, at night, as a security person. Then, my senior year was the best job. I worked in the college's printing plant and I could go there whenever I wanted to. If I had two hours off between classes, I could go work there.

Air Force ROTC really got me on the right track. I enjoyed it, first of all. I found out that it was a good match, me and aviation. Really, it's hard to explain why; I just really enjoyed it. So, at the end of my sophomore year, it was time to decide whether I wanted to go to Advanced ROTC, which was not mandatory. It was optional. Apparently, the ROTC people thought I had something, so, they encouraged me. So, I applied for Advanced ROTC and I was accepted. I applied for a scholarship in my senior year and got that, too.

Oh, the other reason I went into Advanced ROTC is, they give you twenty-five dollars a month and that was big money in those days. My senior year, I got an Air Force ROTC Scholarship, which really helped, and I did well in ROTC. I really did quite well in it. I moved up in the ranks and it motivated me to do well with my other studies. I did quite well in my junior and senior year, as opposed to my sophomore years, which were awful. I almost flunked out.

Then, it came time to work with the Air Force about what I was going to do after I graduated, and that's when I told them that I wanted to fly. So, they had this Flight Introduction Program, where they would pay for you to get a private pilot's license, which was screening for Air Force pilot training. So, I can't honestly recall whether it was my junior year or my senior year that I went to the FIP Program but, at a grass field in New Brunswick, New Jersey, I was taught how to fly, loved it, got a private pilot's license, did a solo cross-country.

I had to go to ROTC summer camp between my junior and senior year and it was at Lockbourne Air Force Base, Ohio. It's kind of like basic training for officers. You take a flight physical there, and then, a couple months before graduation, you have to take another flight physical. So, I did, I passed and I was qualified for flying.

It was all almost like on autopilot at that point. I graduated college. In the morning, we're commissioned, with the brown bars of a second lieutenant. My folks were there, my sister was there. In the afternoon, we had graduation ceremonies in one of the stadiums. I don't know which one anymore. It may not even be there. Then, I was told that I was in the Reserves, to go home and I would get orders. So, I went home, with my '58 Chevy Impala, with a college degree, an officer in the Air Force.

I worked in a mail sorting plant for six months. Then, I got this packet in the mail. It said, "You're going to Air Force jet pilot training at Craig Air Force Base in Selma, Alabama, in October." So, that was what, four months?--June, July, August, September, October. I went down to Craig Air Force Base in Selma, Alabama, and pilot training began.

MG: What was that first flight like for you? Do you remember how you felt? Was it exciting? Were you nervous?

DP: I would like to have some grandiose thing to tell you, but the fact of the matter is, I can't remember. I can remember my first solo flight in a jet, though.

MG: Tell me about that.

DP: Oh, my god. Well, you got three or four rides in a jet trainer, side-by-side jet trainer. Then, when your instructor thought you were ready--and you wouldn't know about it in advance--when he thought you were ready, you land, you taxi to the taxiway, where there's a small, little tower. He'd get out. He'd fasten the seatbelt and say, "Go make three touch-and-go landings and a full stop."

So, one day, he said, "Okay, you're ready. Pull over here," got out. I could remember being happy and scared all at the same time, but, then, I thought to myself, "If you can do it while he's here, you can do it with him not being here." So, it was a feeling of great exhilaration, freedom, which is what you feel when you fly.

Way back, when I was in the Flight Introduction Program, flying an Aeronca Champ tail-wheel aircraft on a grass strip, the fact of the matter is, I didn't know what I was doing. If anything had gone wrong, it was all over for me. I remember taking my solo cross-country. I was supposed to be reading these maps and I got lost on the map. So, I found the New Jersey Turnpike and just followed it down and back.

I really wasn't going to stay in the Air Force. Pilot training was a little over a year. I was going to fly for a few years and go with the airlines, but Vietnam changed all that.

MG: Let us back up just for a minute and talk about what Alabama was like in the early 1960s and what that trip there was like.

DP: Oh, boy. I'll tell you what, that really opened my eyes. I'd never been south of Philadelphia. We had black kids in high school. We had black kids on the football team. We'd changed clothes in the locker room next to black kids. I never really thought about black and white, never. I'd never been south of Philadelphia, like I said.

So, I get the orders. So, I pack up my car and there I go, down to Selma, Alabama. I get there the night before I'm due to report in. I didn't know that I could go on the base and stay for free, so, I rented a motel room. So, the next morning, I figure, "Have a good breakfast." So, I get in my uniform and I go down to this place. It's right by the famous Pettus Bridge, which is famous because of the Martin Luther King marches several years later. [Editor's Note: The Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, was part of the route of a Civil Rights march led by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., in March of 1965.]

I went in and I ordered breakfast. Along with breakfast, there's this white stuff. This is a true story, I swear. I thought it was mashed potatoes. So, I thought it was kind of odd to serve mashed potatoes with eggs and bacon and toast. I put it in my mouth and I just spit it out all over. It was grits. I'd never had grits. I didn't even know what grits were.

So, Selma, Alabama, in 1961, '62, segregation was in full force. The next weekend, with some of the guys in my class who I had met, we went for a ride and we stopped at the Carvel, which was the early iteration of Dairy Queen. I couldn't believe my eyes. There were two windows, "White," "Colored." I'd never seen anything like that in my life. I went to the department store; I can't think of the name of it anymore. It was the big local store. I went to the elevator and it said, "This elevator for white only," I couldn't believe my eyes.

I remember, there was a gubernatorial campaign going on at that time. I don't think it was George Wallace then. I think it was "Big Jim" Folsom, and he was running on a segregation-based platform. I remember seeing him on a little television giving a speech. He was drunk on the Capitol steps. I wrote my father, I said, "I've never seen anything like this--white only,

colored only." [Editor's Note: "Big Jim" Folsom served as Governor of Alabama from 1947 to 1951 and 1955 to 1959. He ran against George C. Wallace in the 1962 gubernatorial campaign, the first of Wallace's successful bids for the Governor's office.]

I started going out with a girl there, who I ended up marrying and I'm now divorced from, and her family had a colored woman as a housekeeper. I thought this whole thing was really kind of odd, because there's segregation, white only, black only--they treated that colored lady like one of their own family. They treated her extremely well. So, I never got over the dichotomy of white only/colored only. Colored can't vote, yet, they treated their housekeepers like one of the family. It was a very, very strange thing.

Alabama was also hot and humid. I really didn't like the humidity. Going out in a flight suit on a hot summer day to an aluminum airplane was really, really--got you wilted very fast. Me and my buddies, we lived in the bachelor officers' quarters. We'd chase girls around town. We quickly found out that Friday night football was a big deal in the South, and that's where we could find girls. So, we'd go to the Friday night football games and, indeed, that's where I met my first wife.

MG: How did you meet her?

DP: Well, there's three of us, or was it four? We saw these three girls sitting there in the stands. They were all fairly cute. So, we just walked up to them, said, "Hi," and introduced ourselves, and the one I was interested in wanted nothing to do with me. So, she introduced me to her friend, who I ended up marrying.

MG: What was your training like in Alabama?

DP: Pilot training was pretty rigorous. There was basic and advanced. Basic was the first six months, where we were in the new Air Force training jet, the T-37. All depending [on] which cycle you were in, you'd go to class in the morning and you'd fly in the afternoon or we'd fly in the morning and go to class in the afternoon. We had mandatory PT, physical training. I found it all enjoyable. I really did. I was very good at flying, I was very good at the military stuff, but I wasn't so good at academics, and that's because we were always out chasing girls.

Then, halfway through the year, we graduated from T-37s and went into T-33s. The T-33, there are still some flying. I loved that airplane. Once again, you'd either fly in the morning or class in the morning, and then, you'd flip-flop and go to the other in the afternoon. It was very intense. You got basic flight instruction and you have a check ride. You had instrument flight instruction, you have a check ride. Formation instruction, you'd have a check ride. Every one of these, you could stumble and fail, and, if you failed, you were out. You were gone.

I ended up with very high grades on the flying end--I was right at the top of the class--pretty high grades on the military end, but not very good grades on the academic end, but I enjoyed it. I have very fond memories of that year. It's a small, little base in a small town in the South and it was fun. It was fun.

MG: Was it the T-33 that you flew in New Brunswick for the first time? What plane was that?

DP: No, no; back in college?

MG: Yes.

DP: No, that was the Aeronca Champ, a prop aircraft, tail-wheel, off a grass strip, airport, grass airport.

MG: What did you like about the T-33?

DP: It was a straight-forward aircraft. It was honest. Unlike the modern aircraft, which are fly-by-wire, there were cables from the stick to the controls. It wasn't as responsive as the more modern aircraft, so, you had to really be on your toes. You had to fly that aircraft all of the time. It didn't have nose-wheel steering, so, you had to turn it on the ground with differential braking. If you did that wrong, you could cock the nose gear, and, when you did, you couldn't move until somebody came and got it straightened out. That was very embarrassing. The whole base knew that you'd cocked the nose gear.

I flew the T-33 later on in my career, when I was in an F-106 fighter squadron. It had three T-33s we used for target [practice], and for shuttling guys around. I've got about seven hundred hours in the T-33 and I just liked that airplane. I did a lot of acrobatics in it. I liked aerobatics. It was in the T-33 that I came close to ejecting from a jet aircraft.

It was in the 1970-72 time frame when I was assigned the 20th Air Division as the F-106 Standardized/Evaluation Officer. I had flown one of our T-33s out to Colorado Springs for a fighter standardization/evaluation conference. On the way back, I was asked to stop at the former Biggs Air Force Base near El Paso and pick up our Director of Operations, Colonel Joe Joyner. I did. I was in the front seat and flying and Colonel Joyner was in the back seat.

We took off and leveled off at 35,000 heading back to Langley AFB, VA. Shortly after we leveled off, there was an explosion, the aircraft shook violently, the engine rolled back and we started losing altitude. I pulled the power back, recovered the aircraft and leveled off. But, each time I tried to advance the throttle, the jet engine and aircraft would violently vibrate. I noticed the oil pressure dropping and flight controls felt sloppy and loose. (We later learned that a compressor blade had broken loose, severed the engine oil line and severed the rudder and the elevator cables.)

I declared an emergency and asked for a vector to the nearest airfield. I jettisoned the external fuel tanks (which I had always wanted to do) and I asked Colonel Joyner to read the "prepare to eject checklist." We had descended from 35,000 feet to 10,000 feet and were getting ready to eject when I saw Abilene Municipal Airport. It was windy and blowing dust and there was a direct 90-degree crosswind.

We probably should have ejected, but I somehow landed the aircraft, got it stopped just before the end of the runway, taxied off the runway, shut the aircraft down and both of us climbed out.

What we saw amazed us--the aircraft fuselage was full of holes, like Swiss cheese. I was given an Air Force "Well Done" Award (a big deal) for saving the aircraft, but I've always wondered if the better course of action would have been to eject.

MG: What makes someone good at flying? What qualities did you have that made you a great flyer?

DP: If we knew that and we could bottle it, we could sell it for a lot of money. You know, I've never thought about that. You need to be able to think out in front of the airplane. If you could liken it to driving a car, looking three cars or four cars down the road. You have to be out in front of the airplane. You have to be able to think clearly and quickly. You, I think, need to enjoy the fact that there's nobody in charge of this thing but you--and it's up to you to do it well or it's up to you to screw it up. That's about it.

MG: Was it in Alabama that you had your wings pinned on you?

DP: It was. It was the end of pilot training, October 1962.

MG: What was that like?

DP: It was pretty awesome, actually. After working so hard for a year and one month, thirteen months, to see those silver wings there, it really was. That was a big deal.

MG: Was it something you would show off to the girls you were meeting?

DP: By that time, I was engaged, but, yes, it was, "Why yes, I fly jets." [laughter]

MG: What happened after your training in Alabama?

DP: Well, I wanted to go to first-line fighters. That was my whole goal. If my academics had been better, I probably would've gone to first-line fighters, but there were very few of them, and so, I ended up as an instructor. They said, "We want our very top pilots as instructors." So, I ended up an instructor. I didn't like that very much, because I wasn't flying [except with] some young kid, like I was one year earlier.

So, I did that, built up quite a few flying hours. It was 1964 and I was very close to serving my obligated three or four years out of pilot training, I don't remember, which I really wanted to fly fighters and I heard about Vietnam. Back then, they called it Southeast Asia. It was a rather small conflict and I heard you could go over there and fly prop fighters and come back and fly jet fighters. So, I volunteered, unbeknownst to anyone--by that time, I was married.

I got orders and it said I was to report to Hurlburt Field, Florida, and it said, "O1-Es," [Cessna O-1E "Bird Dog"]. I called the Sergeant down at personnel and I said, "There's been a mistake. I applied for A1-Es, a prop-driven fighter." He said, "Oh, it's just a typo, Lieutenant. Don't worry about it." Anyway, I packed up the [family]--by that time, there's a wife and a kid, little kid--and drove back to New Jersey.

MG: You were living in California at this time.

DP: Yes.

MG: How did you get out to California? What were you doing in California?

DP: I was an instructor pilot.

MG: Okay, that's where you were teaching.

DP: Yes. So, we drive old Highway 40 [laughter] and we get down to Hurlburt Field, Florida, for counterinsurgency training and training in the aircraft I'm going to fly. We go out to the flight line and there's this little puddle-jumper airplane, with a tail-wheel and rockets hanging under the wings. I said, "Where's the A1?" They said, "You're going to O1s. That's an O1." I was assigned to be a Forward Air Controller in this little, lightly-armed spotter aircraft. I couldn't believe it. My new wife, Betty, who's downstairs, been married to her ten years, the first time she ever saw that airplane, she said, "Our country sent you to war in that?" [laughter]

So, I spent several months down there in counterinsurgency training, learning how to fly the O1, learning how to mark targets, learning how to control fighter aircraft airstrikes, and then, I was off to Vietnam. I flew back out to California, where a very good friend of mine met me. I stayed with him for a night or two, he took me to Travis Air Force Base, not far from here, and dropped me off. The flight got cancelled, the flight from Travis to Vietnam. It was a military contract flight, like an airliner contracted to fly people there. So, he picked me up, I went back to his house for a night. This is really unreal.

Oh, before that, I had to go to survival school near Reno, at Stead Air Force Base, which is now Stead Airfield, north of Reno. So, I went to survival school there for three weeks. I thought it rather strange, said, "I'm going to war in a warm jungle climate," I went to survival school in April and it was snowing up there. So, there I am, learning how to survive in the snow, when I'm going to go live in the jungle.

So, the flight finally took off and I think we stopped in Anchorage, Alaska, for fuel. Then, we stopped at the Philippines and they said, "Everybody who's going to the jungle survival school, get off here." Well, I don't recall anybody telling me I was going to jungle survival school. I should have, I later learned. So, I stayed on the airplane. The next thing I know, I'm in Saigon.

I expected somebody would meet me. No one did. I'm all alone. It's nighttime. So, I didn't know what to do. I had a bag. So, I went down to the officers' club and ran into a guy I knew from California. So, he let me sleep in his place, and then, he said, "Your orders say Bien Hoa." He said, "You'd better get to Bien Hoa." I said, "Okay, how do I do that?" "Well, go down to the airport and just ask around for a flight to Bien Hoa." So, that's what I did. I went down to the airfield the following day. I mean, this is in a war zone. You could hear explosions and things off in the distance. But, I found somebody to fly me over to Bien Hoa and I found the squadron I was assigned to.

I walked in and this guy said, "Pinsky, where have you been? We've been looking for you for three days." "I didn't know. I got to Saigon and there was nobody there." He said, "Well, okay." So, then, they checked me out there with what's called an in-theater checkout, I mean, controlling real airstrikes, shooting real rockets and throwing real smoke grenades.

Then, they assigned me to a podunk, little airstrip called Duc Hoa, D-U-C H-O-A, Duc Hoa. It was a pierced-steel planking strip--in other words, it was just metal laid down on dirt--airstrip. I was assigned to an Air Force Air Liaison Officer. It was myself and one other Forward Air Controller and an Air Force Liaison Officer, ALO, it's called. We were there to support the Army of Vietnam 25th Division, and we supported others there, too. There were Special Forces A-teams, there were some Delta Forces that passed through, and other special units.

I spent my next year in this little podunk place in the middle of nowhere called Duc Hoa. It was halfway between Saigon and the Cambodian border, south of Tay Ninh, and my year of combat in Vietnam started.

MG: Yes, you had 614 combat missions.

DP: Yes.

MG: 1,100 combat flying hours. That is a lot.

DP: It is.

MG: Can you talk to me a little bit about what that was like, maybe some memorable missions or just some general comments on that?

DP: It didn't take me long in training to get word that I was going to a very dangerous job. The numbers that were floated around were, half of the people who went over to do my job weren't coming home. So, I understood that. I didn't like it, but I understood it. I think, at least for the first half of the tour, I didn't think I was going to make it through. I didn't think I was coming back--so, just go do what you're taught to do. I'd fly every chance I had. I'd fly three, four, five times a day, to make the year go faster. There was no Internet, there was no e-mail, there was no long-distance telephone. The only correspondence from home was letters and I tried to write every day.

I was a good Forward Air Controller, a very good Forward Air Controller. My call sign was "Cobra Four" and I got pretty well-known with the fighter pilots out of Saigon and Bien Hoa and off the Navy ships. I took pride in really doing a good job of rolling in and putting those smoke rockets right on the target, "Hit my smoke," rather than, "Hit forty yards south of my smoke."

We did a lot of visual reconnaissance. A lot of those 614 missions were what we called "VR, Visual Reconnaissance," where I had an area that I was responsible for and I had to know it like the back of my hand. You'd fly it every day, every single day, so [that] you could see where something had changed. I was pretty good at that. I was not shy to take chances, which is how I

ended up with some of the medals that I ended up with. I wasn't out for any medals. I was just out to do a good job.

One of the more memorable missions, when I was controlling F-100s and we had a battalion of enemy down there and we're dropping bombs on them and napalm, one of the F-100s got shot down. The pilot ejected and he landed, like, right in the middle of the guys that we'd been bombing. So, while I was trying to get more fighters there to help us out, the only thing I could think of to do was to try to get them to shoot at me. I don't know why I thought of that. I mean, you just do things. So, I made lots of low passes and got them to shoot at me.

They shot my airplane up pretty well, but I was still flying. I heard a helicopter on frequency and I vectored him in. He picked the pilot up. He was safe, and I went back and landed and discovered about ten or fifteen bullet holes in my airplane. I had a bunch of Plexiglas in my face and neck. It was pretty serious. I got a Purple Heart out of that and a Distinguished Flying Cross.

The most interesting part of this story--one day, several months after the mission, I was told to get into my O-1 and fly to Bien Hoa Air Base. When I got there, I was escorted to the hall where, much to my surprise, the Vice President of the United States, Hubert Humphrey, presented and pinned on my Distinguished Flying Cross. I later received an autographed photo of the Vice President pinning the DFC.

But, there were just a lot of missions like that over the next year. It was about three-quarters of the way through when I thought to myself, "You just might make this. You just might get home."

I was doing some very interesting stuff, too, with Special Forces A-teams and with Delta Forces. At the time, nobody knew we were operating in Cambodia. I had one or two missions into Cambodia, which were ferocious. I've never, never seen ground fire like that. It was just--I couldn't wait to get the heck out of there. It was really, really intense.

MG: What was it like saying good-bye to your child and wife, knowing that the chances were tricky, that you were going into something that was, you said before, fifty percent of people ...

DP: Yes. You're young and you're bulletproof. It was hard, but I was going off to do something I wanted to do--young man, bulletproof, show that I could make it in a war, do what I was trained to do. Although it was hard, it wasn't that hard. My then wife wanted to get pregnant before I left and that was one thing that I wouldn't let happen, because I didn't want a pregnant widow there without her husband. I didn't see her for a whole year, a whole year. There was no R&R in Hawaii with your wife, which they did in later years, just wrote letters. I think I made one phone call on an R&R. I had an R&R to Bangkok and I had an R&R to Taiwan, Taipei.

Everybody got one R&R, so, my one was to Bangkok. I really enjoyed it. My other one, I was sent on. I was getting hit a lot. I was getting shot up an awful lot, and my boss referred to me as a "flak magnet." So, I landed one day and he said, "You're going on R&R." I said, "I've already been on R&R." He said, "Lieutenant," maybe I was a captain by then, he said, "you're going on

R&R." I said, "Well, okay, how about if I go to Hong Kong?" He says, "You're going on R&R on the first aircraft that's leaving Saigon going somewhere." He saved my life, probably. I mean, by that time, I was wild, just wild. I didn't care.

So, the airplane went to Taipei. I'm in my jungle fatigues, my jungle boots, my filthy, dirty underwear. I got off in Taipei and I don't know how I got to this gorgeous hotel downtown. It's so unreal to go from your filthy, dirty fatigues, jungle fatigues--I don't remember whether I had my gun on my hip or not, probably not--and walked into this gorgeous hotel lobby. It's air-conditioned, thick carpeting. I remember this--I went to the bar, had two or three drinks, went to the room, laid down and slept for eighteen straight hours. So, that was interesting.

MG: You needed the rest.

DP: I needed the rest, and he recognized it. I didn't. So, he probably saved my life.

MG: Can you talk to me about some of the men you served with and the friendships you formed in Vietnam?

DP: I was in a weird category of Air Force officer there. I wasn't on a main base with a squadron. I was on an outlying outpost and there was the air liaison officer, the ALO. He was a Major and I had three of those, because their tours ended and somebody else came in. Then, there were always one or two other Forward Air Controllers. The one I met when I first got there, his name is John Postgate. I'm going to see him in two weeks at a Forward Air Controller reunion.

One very, very weird, strange experience, another friend that I'll see down there at the reunion in two weeks--I got a call from Bien Hoa that they were sending a new Forward Air Controller out for me to check out. You had to have this in-theater checkout and they wanted me to give him two, three rides, sign him off, and then, they would send him on his way. I remember driving out to our airfield in a jeep, four-wheel drive, mud, raining a little bit; in comes this Army helicopter.

Who gets off the helicopter? one of my pilot training roommates. I couldn't believe it, Mike Morea. He and I have stayed in touch over the years. I didn't like that at all. I didn't like it at all. I could see the headlines now, "Pilot Training Roommates Shot Down. Both Die in the Same Aircraft," but I checked him out. He went on his way and neither one of us died. That was very weird, one, seeing a guy that you roomed with for thirteen months get off this helicopter in the middle of a war zone.

In '65 and early '66, I thought we could win the war. I really thought we're doing the right thing. I was motivated. I saw awfully good people putting their lives on the line for other people. You didn't need to know each other, you didn't need to like each other--you put your life on the line for other servicemen.

An example is the second Silver Star I was awarded. The Silver Star is the United States Armed Force's third-highest personal decoration for valor in combat. The Silver Star Medal is awarded primarily to members of the United States Armed Forces for Gallantry in action against an

enemy of the United States. Although I could have easily lost my life in both cases, I am particularly proud of one of my missions.

It was dusk, I had flown several missions that day, was tired and had just sat down in the chow tent for some supper. I was told that one of our Ranger Battalions, one I supported, was on a mission south of us in Mekong Delta, in a notoriously dangerous place for friendly forces. I grabbed a quick bite and it was dark by the time I took off. The situation for the Ranger Battalion was bad--they were surrounded and taking heavy casualties.

I flew over them all night long, four or five missions, leaving only to refuel, re-arm and return. I put in air strike after air strike and, when I ran out of fighters, I flew low over them firing my AR-15 rifle and my .38 pistol. I called in as many flare ships as I could as the light from their flares provided much needed light. At one point, the Ranger Captain told me they were about to overrun his position and to put napalm right on his location. I directed the fighters to put it as close as possible by marking with my white phosphorus rockets and hand-dropped smoke grenades.

The funny thing is that I later learned that thousands of rounds were fired at me and my aircraft and I was so focused on saving those Rangers that I don't remember hearing any of them. I put in dozens of air strikes and, when dawn finally arrived, I couldn't believe the bodies I saw, all around the surviving Rangers--dozens, if not hundreds, of enemy bodies. The Ranger Battalion took a lot of casualties, but the majority survived. I stayed overhead until the helicopters to evacuate them arrived.

As I signed off, the Ranger Captain called on the radio, for everyone within radio range to hear, "Cobra 4 (my call sign), thank you, you saved our lives."

I later met that Ranger Captain, Bo Gillespie. He had saved me a VC flag and helmet to give me as souvenirs of that terrible night. Over a beer, he said he thought sure I would be shot down, there were so many rounds fired at me and my aircraft. When I replied, "I think if there is a bullet with your name on it, then you're done." He replied with something I've remembered to this day: "It's not the bullet with my name on it that worries me, it's all those addressed, 'To whom it may concern.'"

I might have helped save his life and those of his men that night, but he would have done the same for me.

My first Air Liaison Officer went back for a second tour in A1-Es and he got shot down and killed. My next two Air Liaison Officers, after I left, I never saw them again, but one, whose name was Pappy Marshall--he was called Pappy because he just looked like an old guy. He was short and kind of bald-headed, and I still have the napkin he gave me. It was getting close to the end of my tour. Sure enough, I got an assignment to jet fighters, to the top jet fighter in the Air Force and I was delighted. So, it was just a matter of flying out my tour.

So, I came back from a morning VR mission and we had this little chow hall where we sat down and ate with the Army guys. He walks up and Pappy says, "Here, have a napkin." I said, "I already have a napkin, sir." He says, "No, read it." I opened it up, I still have it to this day, "Cobra Four, you just flew your last mission in 'Nam this tour, Pappy." He didn't want me to know when my last mission was. So, then, I had a week of hanging around, doing nothing, just hanging around, doing nothing.

Then, finally, they took me over to Tan Son Nhut Airbase in Saigon, in a helicopter. I landed there and I waited around all day, all day long for the charter flight, a Braniff charter flight, 707. So, I don't recall how I got down to the terminal, but it was an awful place. It was dark--well, it was night, but it was dark anyway--and it was dank and it smelled like only Saigon can smell. There had been terrorist attacks and there had been sappers throwing bombs and hand grenades--and there I am in my jungle fatigues. I'd gotten rid of all my underwear. Everything went out. I only took home what I needed to wear on the flight to the US.

They started calling off numbers. Each of us had a number. The plane's getting full and they haven't called my number, and I'm really getting worried. So, I went up and talked to this guy and he said, "Don't worry about it, Captain. You're on the airplane." So, finally, my number finally got called. It is an experience that's hard to describe. Here, you've been in that war in a jungle environment for a year and you're in this dank, smelly, humid terminal. It's nothing like any terminal you've ever seen. It's just awful. It's like a warehouse.

You walk from there and there's a Braniff 707. You walk up the steps. You step in the airplane and a beautiful, blonde, round-eyed stewardess says, "Welcome aboard," hands you a cold washcloth. It's air-conditioned and they're playing US music. It's like going from one world into another world. I couldn't believe it. So, I walked back, got in my seat, fastened in, with a cold washcloth. We taxied out. We take off. When the gear came up, everybody cheered and, when we left Vietnamese airspace, everybody cheered. It was really an experience, but, one minute, you're in this world, the next minute, you're in the real, modern world.

MG: Were you excited to be in "the real, modern world?"

DP: I was, yes. I really was.

MG: Something you said in the DVD I watched was, "If you fly too careful, that's when you're going to get hurt," or something like that.

DP: Yes, I always felt that way, and so did others, that if you flew too carefully, if you flew too cautiously, if you were predictable, that was when you could get hurt. You always tried to keep

them guessing. I'd fly low. I'd fly a little higher. I'd fly in from that direction, in from this direction. You never wanted to make a pass on a target from the same direction, because it's the second time around that got guys shot down.

There were several people killed on their last mission because they were being too careful. I always thought one of the reasons I survived is, I was flying pretty low. It's hard to hit a small aircraft like that flying low, but you get up to a thousand feet, fifteen hundred feet, it's easier to see you and shoot down. So, yes, I think that you could be too careful and, inadvertently, be too obvious.

MG: Can you talk to me a little bit about your homecoming and maybe touch on why it was different, what could have been different if you returned later in the war?

DP: Well, we flew from Saigon to Hickam Air Force Base, Honolulu, where they refueled. I remember getting off and going into the terminal, in a modern world, air-conditioned, beautiful, having a Mai Tai, which knocked me right on my butt. My father's brother, my uncle, and his wife met me at Travis. My folks had sent my uniform, my class A blue uniform, out to his brother, my uncle. He'd had it pressed. They took me to his house. I got changed, and then, they took me to San Francisco International Airport, where I flew non-stop back to Kennedy. My mother and father, my wife and my little boy were there to meet me.

My father was so proud. There had been several articles written about me in my hometown paper, because I got quite a few medals--mostly for being stupid and living. So, there was a lot of press about me back home. My father was so proud of me. So, I remember my father and mother and my then wife and my little boy, who, by that time, was two, going on three. He was a little shy. He hadn't seen me in a year.

So, my father couldn't find a parking space. This is a true story. He double-parked in front of the terminal. This is prior to 9/11 and all that stuff. So, we go walking out and there's this big, burly New York cop with his foot up on the bumper, writing a ticket. My father, he says, "What are you doing?" He says, "I'm writing a ticket for this car." He says, "You can't do that," and this cop says, "What do you mean I can't do that?" My father says, "My boy here, he just got back from Vietnam in one piece." This cop says, "You did?" I said, "Yes, sir, I did." He says, "You're right. I can't write you a ticket."

So, my mother and father were in the front of the car and my little boy was on my mom's lap and I was in the back, smooching and hugging up and all this kind of stuff. I remember my father saying, "Can't this wait until you guys get home?" Then, my father wanted to stop for ice cream sundaes. So, we stopped for ice cream sundaes. The next morning, my father calls early and says, "Why don't I take Bruce shopping while you and your..." "So, okay," and that was the homecoming.

MG: How would it have been different if you came back in 1971 or 1972?

DP: I was ...

MG: Did you witness any of that?

DP: Oh, yes, yes. I was welcomed warmly when I got back to Teaneck, New Jersey, in 1966. I was invited to several speaking engagements. I was greeted very warmly. I remember going to the DMV to renew my driver's license and they treated me very well, very nicely. The guys who came back in '70, '71, '72 didn't get treated near as well. I think we all felt it, really, but the antiwar sentiment, I don't think, got started until the later '60s, '68, '69, something like that.

MG: I meant to ask this earlier, but what are you wearing when you are flying?

DP: In Vietnam, I'm either wearing a flight suit or jungle fatigues and a survival vest.

MG: Okay. How do you feel when you are in that kind of uniform?

DP: Well, you wore--you're supposed to wear a flak jacket, but I didn't. I always folded my flak jacket in two and put it under me. I sat on my flak jacket, because that's the part of my body that I didn't want to get shot up. A survival vest, let's see, it's a mesh, khaki-colored vest and you've got all your survival gear in there, flares. We carried our thirty-eight-[caliber] pistol on our hip in a holster. We had a small M-16, called AR-15, that I bungeed into the cockpit. In the survival vest, there was a survival knife, dye markers, flares, a survival radio, all that kind of stuff. It didn't feel any different from wearing anything else. I don't remember when we would wear jungle fatigues as opposed to flight suits, because we had both. I just can't recall why we wore one and why we wore another.

MG: What was it like to transition from a year in war and combat to home and family life?

DP: I may be painting this picture with a broad brush that I shouldn't use, but I found it remarkably easy, where others have not found it remarkably easy. I don't know. I was able to just pull the curtain down on that phase of my life and say let's move forward. The only effect I have from being in Vietnam for a full year is, loud noises still startle me, or if somebody walks up behind me. My wife will do that. I'll be in the kitchen making coffee and I'll turn around and jump. That's probably because we were mortared and shelled almost every night I was there. We'd jump out of our cots and go into the sand-bagged bunker.

My attitude was, I was trained, I was sent over there to do a job. I would do the job to the best of my ability, and I tried not to let things bother me. Did I see some pretty bad things? yes, some horrible things, yes--but that's part of what people who've never been to war don't understand, but my transition, emotionally, psychologically, was relatively easy.

My ex-wife was happy to have me back in charge of things, because she didn't like being in charge of things. Some of the other guys had the opposite, where their wives did very well while they were gone, making all the decisions, in charge of things. Then, they'd come back and they were, "Head of the household's back," so, they would have issues, but it was remarkably easy. Also, I was so happy that I was going to front-line jet fighters that I was just thrilled to death.

MG: What was next for you? Did you stay in New Jersey?

DP: I had a couple of weeks of leave, spent some of it in New Jersey, some of it down at my then wife's parents' house. Then, I was sent to Perrin Air Force Base in Denison, Texas, for lead-in jet fighter training in F-102s. I was there for six months, because I hadn't flown jets in a long time. So, I got lead-in jet fighter training.

Then, from there, I went down to Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Florida, where I was introduced to the F-106, the Air Force's leading, fastest, hottest jet fighter at the time. We spent six months down there getting checked out in the F-106, learned everything about it. [Editor's Note: The Convair F-102 Delta Dagger jet fighter entered service in 1956 and the Convair F-106 Delta Dart jet fighter entered service in 1959.]

My family was with me; so, you go from place to place to place, which is why I don't like moving anymore. Then, from there, I was assigned to Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, Hampton, Virginia. I flew F-106s there for three years.

MG: Can you tell me a little more about the F-106 and how it was really state of the art?

DP: At that time, it was the Air Force's leading, hottest fighter. It held the world speed record for single-engine jet aircraft. It still does, actually.

MG: What is that record?

DP: Oh, boy, I knew you were going to ask me that. [laughter]

MG: Or an approximation.

DP: Somewhere around fifteen hundred miles per hour, right in that area. [Editor's Note: In 1959, an F-106 Delta Dart was flown 1,525.95 miles per hour by Colonel Joseph Rogers over Edwards Air Force Base to set the world speed record for a single-engine jet fighter.] It was really enjoyable, because it was a beautiful airplane, gorgeous airplane. I still look at it and go, "Man, what a good-looking airplane."

It was single-seat, meaning it was just me, no co-pilots, no navigator, single-engine, single-seat, single-engine jet fighters. It flew like a dream. It flew like a sports car. It was a great dogfighting aircraft. Formation flying in it was fun. I flew it every chance I got. I became an instructor pilot in it. It was just a magnificent, wonderful airplane.

MG: What were you doing flying it for three years?

DP: I started out just as a buck pilot. You would train. The aircraft was on alert around the borders of the country, on air defense alert. So, there were F-106s on alert. If any unknown aircraft were flying in, Russian aircraft, any unknowns, we'd get scrambled and we'd go out and intercept them. So, we'd train, we'd sit alert. We'd train, sit alert. Some of the alert was at our home base, some was at outlying bases. There'd be big air defense exercises, where we'd all go

up north, and then, they'd send in "enemy" aircraft from Canada. We'd go out and intercept them--a lot of training, a lot of training.

MG: Just for context, can you say why you needed to intercept the Russians and what was kind of going on in the world at this point?

DP: Well, that was back during the Cold War. There was a lot of Russian air traffic from Russia down to Cuba. They would come test our air defenses. There was the threat of war, nuclear war, with the Soviet Union. So, we were on air defense alert here in the US and in Western Europe as well.

MG: You told a pretty funny story in the interview with the museum [Pacific Coast Air Museum] about coming pretty close to the Russians, I think maybe up in Alaska.

DP: We were sent to Korea after the *Pueblo* ship was captured and our Navy guys were still in North Korean hands. So, we had extensive efforts to try to find out where those guys were, to rescue them. Some very sophisticated, secret reconnaissance aircraft would fly up north and we'd escort them, and did that a lot. We were watching out for enemy fighters. These reconnaissance aircraft would go close to places that they shouldn't go. [Editor's Note: On January 23, 1968, the USS *Pueblo* was captured by North Korean forces. In December 1968, the eighty-three man crew was released back to the United States.]

One day, sure enough, here comes a Russian fighter. I could see him marching right down the radar scope. I told our control that I had him. The reconnaissance aircraft peeled off, hit the deck and scooted back home. I'm going to get to dogfight this guy and shoot him down. At the last minute, when he got to the line across which I could shoot him, he turned around and went back. I was ready to arm the missiles and go for it. So, I didn't get to do every fighter pilot's dream, shoot down an enemy fighter.

MG: This is around the time you were promoted to Major.

DP: Yes, while I was flying the F-106, I made Major early, three years early.

MG: Yes.

DP: Probably based on my war record.

MG: Yes. What was your next step? You went to Virginia.

DP: Well, Langley Air Force Base is in Virginia. So, I flew F-106s there, '67, '68, '69. Then, because I was selected early for Major, I was sent to Armed Forces Staff College, which was near Langley. It was in Norfolk, Virginia. So, I kept flying the F-106 and T-33 with the Langley Squadron while I went to Armed Forces Staff College. Then, from there, I was sent up to Fort Lee in Virginia, which was an Air Defense Headquarters. I was the Fighter Standardization and Evaluation Officer. So, I was still flying F-106s and T-33s. I was responsible for the

standardization and evaluation of all F-106 and all T-33 pilots up and down the East Coast. I would do that out of the headquarters at Fort Lee. I was there from '70 to '72.

Then, in '72, they needed somebody to command the F-106 detachment at Homestead Air Force Base, Florida. So, I was selected to do that. That was really a plum job for a Major, to command an F-106 outfit. So, the F-106s were down there at Southern Florida to do two things--[first], to defend Southern Florida from the Cuban threat. We scrambled all the time against Cuban aircraft. That was during the time that President Nixon was in office and he had his Florida White House at Key Biscayne. Anytime he was coming or was there or leaving, when he flew in or out, we would scramble, and not escort him so much as make sure no other aircraft were a threat to him, and the same thing when he left.

So, I would work with the Secret Service, with the advanced planning party of the President, and that was very enjoyable. They're very talented, very good people. They're so good at what they do and they're very nice people. So, I got to meet the advanced party for the President. The Presidential pilot took me up once. I was in Air Force One, sitting in the President's seat, which was very cool. So, we're pretty busy down there and I really enjoyed it. I was in charge. I had a detachment of sixty, eighty people and we had six F-106s and it was nice being in charge.

MG: Can you say what you mean by scramble?

DP: Scramble means you're on alert. The aircraft is cocked and ready to go. All the switches are in the right position up to engine start. Your parachute's in the airplane and you're in your flight suit, ready to go. When the scramble horn goes off, you run down to your airplane. Crew chief runs out. You scramble up the ladder. You start it, and you have to be airborne within five minutes. I prided myself on being airborne in less than five minutes. So, you're "scrambled off"-you scramble out to the airplane and off you go.

Once in Korea, I was scrambled out of a dead sleep. I always prided myself in getting airborne in the F-106 off alert in less than five minutes and faster than anyone else. And that's exactly what I did that night. As I was going through 5,000 feet where you disconnect a certain clip from your parachute, I realized that I was not strapped in, no seat belt, no shoulder harness, no parachute, just me sitting on top of all that. Fortunately, nothing happened, I leveled off and got strapped in and didn't tell a soul about that night.

Another story I think of often is a mission where a wingman and myself were escorting a super-secret reconnaissance aircraft very close to where we weren't supposed to be (I can't and won't say where). An enemy MIG started to close on the reconnaissance aircraft we were escorting. I told him to descend and hit the deck and I led our flight to intercept and hopefully engage and shoot down the enemy fighters (every fighter pilot's dream). The enemy aircraft came into range, I armed my missiles and guns and was ready to engage. But, when he got to a certain "no fly" line, he reversed course and headed away from us. I considered giving chase and shooting him down, but I visualized the headlines in the paper, disarmed my armament, and led my flight home to sit through hours of intelligence debriefings.

MG: Is staying in shape and being healthy important for the kind of work you were doing?

DP: I think so, yes. We pulled a lot of Gs, G-forces, and being healthy and being in good shape help with that.

MG: How did your family feel about moving around so much?

DP: They didn't have a choice. I really can't answer that objectively. I know I didn't like it. I moved twenty-six times. This house right here, where we're sitting, I've lived in longer than any other house in my life. You just did it. It's just part of Air Force life, especially on the part of an up-and-coming Air Force officer. You move a lot.

MG: How was the rest of your life unfolding? Were you growing your family?

DP: When I came back from Vietnam, my then wife got pregnant pretty quickly and we had a second boy. So, one was born in '63, one in '67, so, they're four years apart, and decided we didn't want any more. A girl would've been nice, but three boys would've been intolerable, for me anyway. So, we fixed me, so [that] we couldn't have any more kids.

At that point, I began to focus a lot on my career. I was being told all the right things and you know all this, and I was being groomed for this and that. When I look back on it, I probably could've been a better husband and could've been a better father, not that I was a bad father, but I missed too many baseball games and too many basketball games, although I tried very hard to always be there for birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving and all that.

MG: You ended up doing a lot of work in Europe, some kind of important work. You were Division Chief in Naples, Italy. Can you talk to me about that phase?

DP: Yes, after I left Homestead Air Force Base, I was assigned to a NATO post in Naples, Italy, Allied Air Forces Southern Europe. It was the NATO region of Southern Europe. By that time, I was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and I went over there and was in charge of the division that planned the external reinforcements of Southern Europe. It was a very interesting job. I had officers from five countries under me--US, Italy, Greece, England and Turkey.

We were planning for the external reinforcements of Southern Europe. It was a fascinating job, I was over there for three years, travelled all over Southern Europe, negotiating base rights and things like that. So, if our forces were ever needed to reinforce Europe, it would all be in place. Everybody knew where they were going, where the fuel was coming from, and I got to travel a lot, see a lot of very neat things. I stood on the Turkish border with Russia and looked across into Russia. That led to a long desire to go to Russia, and my wife and I just came back from Russia two weeks ago. I finally got to go.

What was very cool about my job was, one, we were real-world planning. Sure enough, the first Persian Gulf War, '91, they used the plan that my Division came up with. They used what we did. I got to travel to Turkey, Belgium, England, and, of course, living in Europe, there was an opportunity to take leave and travel. So, I used every day of leave to travel--and ski, I was, and still am, a big skier.

From there, I went to the Air War College [in Montgomery, Alabama], which is a pretty prestigious assignment. I enjoyed Air War College, not that I'm a great student or anything, but I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed it to the extent that I did well enough so that I finished in the top ten percent of the class as a Distinguished Graduate--that and a nickel ...

So, I had an assignment [from] there and my assignment was to go back to Langley to be the Commander of the F-106 squadron there--my dream assignment. Nothing else in the world could compare, to go back to the squadron I'd flown in as a Captain and Major as the Commander, and I loved Langley, Southern Virginia.

The other--I'll get back to that in a second--the other thing I liked about Air War College, they were the brightest and best. They were the cream of the crop, and it was so wonderful being around such intelligent people, such self-assured go-getters. Everybody knew that everybody else was top drawer, so, egos were checked at the door. It was a pleasurable experience. I mean, we'd work projects and come up with magnificent things. My paper there--I had to do a paper there--my paper there was on what's called the high-low mix of fighters in the Air Force. My paper was adopted by the Pentagon, and the reason we have F-106s--F-16s, rather--is because of my paper, which that's amazing to me.

Anyway, usually, each morning, we would have a lecture of some kind in the big auditorium, and they were pretty prestigious people that would come--Senators, Congressmen, Secretary of Defense, it was that level, four-star generals. So, we're in there one morning and the Commander of Air War College, I think was a three-star general, says--we get called in there unexpectedly, the whole student body--he said, "The Air Force has released its full colonel list. So, I'd like the following officers to stand," bum-bum-bum. "Let's give them all a big round of applause." That was really cool.

Then, he says, "I have five more officers I'd like to stand," five out of about four hundred--and my name was one of them and I'm [thinking], "What's going on?" "These officers have been promoted to the grade of full Colonel from the secondary zone three years in advance," blew me away. I later learned it was on the work I had done in Europe. So, that was really cool. I mean, I never dreamed of anything like that.

Well, that was the good news. The bad news was, a note in my box, "Call personnel." "Hi, what's up?" "Well, we have good news and bad news." "What could be bad news?" "Well, the good news is, you've probably heard, you're on the Colonels list, three years early." "Yes." "The bad news is, you can't be the Commander of the 48th Fighter Squadron at Langley." "Why?" "Because that's a position we put people in to groom them to become Colonels, and since you're on the list..." So, I said, "Take me off the list, seriously. Take me off the Colonels list." "Can't do that." "Rats." I got assigned to the dreaded Pentagon, "Ugh!"

So, rather than go fly fighters and command one of the finest fighter squadrons in the whole Air Force, I got sent to Washington, DC, and I was sent to the Air Staff, it's called. That's Headquarters, Air Force, called Air Staff. I was the Deputy Division Chief for Air Defense and Missiles. Our division was in on the ground floor of some very interesting things. I didn't know

it at the time, but one of my sections was responsible for launching the first GPS satellites, the very first ones. I didn't even know what GPS was, and they were all engineers and smart guys.

So, I worked there for about a year-and-a-half. I was promoted to full Colonel, put my eagles on. So, they sent me to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I was the Division Chief for Western Hemisphere Policy and Plans. That meant I was responsible for the Joint Chiefs of Staff policy for Cuba, the Caribbean, Central and South America--a fairly big job. That was a very interesting job there, working for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

I didn't like Washington. I didn't like Washington because the coin of the realm was information, I learned. I learned that the higher-ups were always in a battle to get information before the other guy got it and I didn't like that at all, because I'm just a straight-forward, honest guy. The most interesting thing that happened to me was, I get called one day and my boss, a two-star Navy admiral, says, "The Chairman wants to see us." "The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff wants to see us?" "Yes." "What about?" "Well, he's going over to brief President Reagan on this issue we've been studying."

So, we go down there, and I've got the point papers and whatever. We're sitting on a couch in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff office--me, little Dave Pinsky, from the sidewalk in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey--a very nice fellow walks in and he said, "Dave, I'm going to see the President in half an hour. What should I tell him about this issue?" "You're asking me what to tell the President of the U.S.?" We'd studied it, had all the points. So, I briefed him. He says, "Okay, sounds fine. Thank you much." Two days later, that was announced as the policy of the United States--holy crow.

I couldn't believe it, but I didn't like the Pentagon. I didn't like the fact that you were always out to try to get the information prior to somebody else. I didn't like the traffic. I didn't like the fact that staff people go into work at six-fifteen, six-thirty, not getting out until seven o'clock at night. You had to show up on Saturdays, whether you wanted to or not. So, I used what little influence I had left with some friends and worked my way an assignment back out into the field, back out into the flying game.

I got an assignment as the Assistant Director of Operations for the FB-111 wing [the General Dynamics FB-111 "Aardvark," a two-seat medium range bomber jet aircraft] at Plattsburgh Air Force Base, New York. So, I went up there, lived in this lovely, old home on the base, on a parade ground looking at Lake Champlain. The house had a plaque on the front, the Register of Historic Places, and, boy, it was cold there in the winter.

There, I learned about FB-111s and the Strategic Air Command, but I'd only been there six months when they assigned me to Pease Air Force Base in New Hampshire as the Director of Operations. So, that was a pretty fast move up, and so, I went over there. I was working for a friend of mine for a while, and we really did some good things there. We really did some really good things. We aced the operational readiness inspections. We won the SAC bombing competition. We did some really, really good things in that wing.

So, I'm sitting in my office one day. At that point, I had ruptured my Achilles tendon in my right leg playing racquetball. So, I'm hobbling around with a cast and whatever. The phone rings and, "Colonel Pinsky." "Hi, Dave, this is Bill Campbell." I go, "Bill Campbell, Bill--yes, sir!" three-star general in charge of the entire Eighth Air Force. He said, "You've done pretty well there at Pease and we're pretty happy with how you got things straightened out at Plattsburgh and Pease." I didn't know I got things straightened out.

He said, "We're having similar problems out at Beale Air Force Base, out in California. So, we're going to send you out there as Vice Wing Commander until you learn the high-altitude reconnaissance business, and then, we're going to make you Wing Commander. Then, from there, we'll see how you do. Okay with that?" "Yes, sir." [Editor's Note: Lieutenant General William Campbell commanded the Eighth Air Force from 1982 to 1985.]

So, remember that ad where the guy is on the phone with his boss and they go, "Pittsburgh, Monday, Philadelphia, Tuesday, New York, Wednesday--I can do that. [Hangs up] How am I going to do that?" That was exactly my feeling, "How am I going to do that? I'm going to go to one of the most prestigious wings in the whole Air Force, flying SR-71s, the highest, fastest aircraft in the world, and U-2s, and I'm going to straighten them out. How am I going to do that?" So, pack everything up, cross-country drive with two cars, visiting all the parents on the way and all the relatives on the way, I show up at Beale Air Force Base, near Sacramento, with a cast on my right leg.

The high-altitude reconnaissance business is a very cliquey business. In order to be accepted, you have to have grown up in the business and been one of the crew members--and so, I wasn't exactly welcomed with open arms. They moved us into a beautiful Colonel's house on base. Actually, it was a General's house, and I spent the next four-and-a-half years there in that house. I did everything I could do to learn the high-altitude reconnaissance business, including getting myself checked out in the U-2 and flying operational missions in the SR-71 simulator and flying the SR-71 whenever I could, as well as the T-38.

I think that is what actually helped me win over the crew force and the enlisted force. I wasn't a Colonel that just sat in his office or went around telling people what to do--I got out there. When you're on the ramp, flying an airplane, you see the maintenance guys. You talk to them, you find out how they're doing, what's going on. So, I checked out, soloed, got operational in the U-2, flew a few missions in the SR-71 and a lot of missions with the T-38.

After I'd been there about two years, they made me Wing Commander. So, there I am, Wing Commander of the most prestigious wing of the whole US Air Force, the huge base at Beale, huge base, 5,200 people, 23,000 acres, plus another detachment in Florida, plus a detachment in England, plus a detachment in Okinawa, and plus a detachment in an undisclosed location that we weren't allowed to tell anybody we were there, plus sending people all over the world all the time for special missions. It was a very hectic time of my life; because I had people and airplanes and missions going on around the clock around the world, never got a full night's sleep, never in four-and-a-half years, never got a full night's sleep, but it was a wonderful experience.

The reason it was so wonderful, first of all, I was flying the world's fastest aircraft, SR-71. I was flying the famous U-2. I was also flying the T-38 jet trainer, which is like a little sports car, but I was able to do things that affected people's lives. I had 5,200 people working for me on that base, 5,200 people. When I realized that I had the authority to do things that affected people's lives, it dawned on me, very early, that I had the opportunity to beneficially affect their lives. That was my mission.

My mission, from the day I got there until the day I retired out of there, was, "I'm going to do what I can do to make all of the people who work for me [their] life better. If I can make their life better, they'll do a good job for the Air Force." That's what we did. We cleaned things up, painted the base. I gave people the opportunity to renovate their offices and hangars, by providing them the materials, if they would do self-help labor.

The reason they sent me out there is that the wing had had a fairly bad safety record. The pilots were doing things that the Air Force higher-ups weren't very happy about, and that's the thing that they wanted fixed. During the time I was in charge, we had zero major aircraft accidents, almost no minor accidents, and the one thing I'm very proud of, too, actually, we aced every inspection, every single one while I was in charge. We were named the best-managed Air Force base in the world, best-managed Air Force base in the world. I'm very proud of that.

So, why did I retire out of there? That's a very complicated story. They'd told me greater things were in store for me. They told me I'd been groomed, I was going to be a general and all that--but the life I'd led was very, very hard, not so much on me, but on my family and on my marriage. The assignment they gave me, while very prestigious, just was another assignment like being at the Pentagon. I realized that if I pinned on a star that I could go back to the bottom of the food chain, the bottom of the totem pole.

I reflected on the past four-and-a-half years and, other than being a buck F-106 fighter pilot, which were the happiest years of my life, those were the happiest years of my life, being in command of a large wing, a large base, lots of people, with a meaningful mission, very meaningful, and being able to beneficially affect people's lives, that I did not want to go to another headquarters staff job, then, be a Brigadier General and be sent back to the Pentagon and be at the bottom of the food chain again. It'd also been hard on my marriage and I thought maybe I should have an opportunity to try to recover my marriage. So, I retired out of Wing Commander at Beale Air Force Base.

MG: Did you stay in Sacramento?

DP: Beale is actually north of Sacramento; I stayed there for six months while I went on this worldwide job search. My job search was my full-time job. I had an office set up, had files. I interviewed all over the country. I interviewed with defense contractors, aircraft manufacturing firms, consulting companies, and I interviewed everywhere. I really worked hard at the job search.

I had a couple of job offers in the aerospace industry world, but I had this feeling--well, one, I didn't want to go back to Washington--but I had this feeling that the defense dollars were going

to dry up and, if they did, the defense contracting business would dry up. I'm glad I made that decision, because many of my friends who, during that time period, got out and went with defense contractors or consulting firms lost their jobs.

I interviewed with American Airlines down in Dallas-Fort Worth, took their physical, took their tests, took their simulator flying test. They offered me a job in the right seat and, after two years, I would go in the left seat, but two reasons I didn't take the job with American. One, they'd just gone to the two-tier pay system, where the people who were already onboard were making lots of money, but the people coming in were [stuck with] two to three years of really lousy salary. Also, with American, when you're junior, your domicile's going to be Dallas-Fort Worth or Chicago. So, I said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

I kept looking around and a headhunter got my résumé. I had several résumés and one of them was written to target to a high-level management job. It talked about the organizations that I had formed, the projects I had been in charge of, the organizations that were not doing well that I helped get on the right track. This headhunter found a position here in Santa Rosa, which I didn't even know where it was. They were looking for a new Deputy Director of Utilities; that's water/wastewater utilities.

They'd had some really bad things happen here--wastewater spills, illegal discharges--and they fired everybody. They were trying to build this new organization. So, they'd hired this top-level civil engineer to be the head of the thing and do all the engineering work, but they needed somebody to build the organization. So, they submitted my résumé. I came over and interviewed. It turns out that the top-level civil engineer, who ended up being my boss and hired me, was a former Navy guy and he liked having a military guy who, he figured, was probably pretty organized and knew what I was doing.

So, when I first got the letter to come to Santa Rosa and interview, I was living near Beale Air Force Base, Marysville, California; actually, living in Yuba City. I didn't even know where Santa Rosa was. I'd never heard of Santa Rosa. I looked on the map, looked up and down California, finally found it, drove over here three times for interviews, got hired and moved over here, bought a house up the hill. I spent eighteen years as the Deputy Director of Utilities, built the organization, which I'm very proud of.

It was fun at first, because there were no restrictions on us. They had placed a building ban on new houses in Santa Rosa and, in order to lift the building ban, you had to solve this water/wastewater problem, how to treat it, where to put it, and so, we did that.

I really enjoyed being given the responsibility of building a brand-new organization, from the ground up. I came in at a senior management level and was given the resources, latitude and authority to build an organization to solve a major public policy issue. After retiring as a Wing Commander in the Air Force, I often thought about how lucky I was to have landed where I did, at such a high management level and being given the responsibility that I had been given.

Over the next few years, we built an organization of almost 200 highly-qualified people, got the building ban lifted and designed, funded and built the project I'm probably proudest of in my post-Air Force days--the Geysers Recharge Pipeline project.

We had been discharging highly-treated wastewater into the Russian River. But, to get the building ban lifted, we had to agree to try to get the wastewater out of the river and to a higher and better use. So, we designed, funded, got approval and built a 37-mile long, 42-inch wide, high-pressure pipeline from our treatment plant, up to 4,200 feet in elevation, where it was stored in a one-million-gallon tank we built, then, pumped by the geo thermal company into the ground to recharge the geysers steam fields to produce clean energy.

Not only was I on the team that designed, funded, planned, got approval and built this \$200-million project, I was put in charge of getting it into operation and running smoothly. I'm pretty proud of that.

I worked on my marriage, but it didn't work, so, my ex-wife and I divorced, well, probably five years after we'd been here. I was single for a few years, met Betty twelve years ago. She and I have been married just over ten years now and I'm happy as I can be.

MG: How did you meet Betty?

DP: You remember me telling you that I liked baseball, and I played baseball, Little League, Babe Ruth League, [American] Legion ball, high school ball, college ball, service ball, but, then, I had to stop because of my jobs in the Air Force, but I continued to try to play softball when I could. So, when I got to Santa Rosa, I joined a slow-pitch softball team. I was legging out a base hit and, all of a sudden, something in my knee popped.

I went to see this orthopedic surgeon and he scheduled me for surgery and I had to go in for a pre-op. It was two weeks before Christmas. There was this awfully cute girl with a huge smile decorating the office Christmas tree. So, I joked around with her a little and she joked around with me a little. She knew I was in there for--or, no, I told her that I was in for my pre-op--and she said, "Well, how will you decorate your Christmas tree if you're having surgery two weeks before Christmas?" I said, "Because you're going to help me, right?" She said, "Yes, I'll help you."

I had the operation. She didn't help me because I didn't know her name or phone number. I had no way to contact her. I healed pretty fast, so, I went in for my post-op, with my crutches still in the shrink wrap, never used them. She was there and she said, "You never used the crutches;" said, "No, didn't need them." She said, "You didn't call me to help with the Christmas tree." I said, "I had no way to contact you." I said, "Can I have your phone number?"

So, we talked on the phone off and on for a month or so. So, I went back to see her boss, the doctor, who I'd known for a long time, and I said, "Hey, Gary, I need to ask you something." He says, "I know, I know. She's asked me, too. It's okay if you two date; just keep it out of the office." So, we started going out. I was never getting married again and, two years later, we got married, as happy as I can be.

MG: Good. I wanted to ask if you missed working with planes when you were working with the utility department here, if you missed aircraft.

DP: Well, that's a whole section of my life we haven't covered yet, the last five--the last eight or nine, no, when did I retire? hang on a second. I don't remember when I retired from the utility. It's on the plaque in there. I can look it up. [Editor's Note: Colonel David Pinsky retired in 2005.]

What I missed most was the people after I left the Air Force. I came here, I went to work as the Deputy Director of Utilities and I really didn't have time to focus on anything else. I wanted to start flying general aviation right away, but I just didn't have the time. You recall, I was working on my marriage. When my marriage failed, I didn't have the money to fly, but, after I retired from the water/wastewater utility, the Air Museum here heard that I was available and they invited me out.

Actually, it all started with a guy who worked for the City of Santa Rosa in the warehouse. He approached me one day and said, "Didn't you fly fighters in the Air Force?" I said, "Yes, I did." He said, "We have an F-16 out there that we're restoring and we're trying to find out where the canopy raising switch is, because we've got it all wired up, but we can't figure out where the switch is." So, I said, "Sure, I can come help you." Then, I made some phone calls to find out where the switch was.

So, I went out there one day after work. There I am, in my three-piece suit, crawling up a ladder, got in there, "Here it goes, right here." They were as happy as could be. I was a hero in their minds. They learned a little later that I was retiring from my job and they were looking for a new Executive Director of the Air Museum. So, I interviewed and I was selected to be the Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Air Museum. It was almost a volunteer job. The pay was so little, it was like a stipend, and there was no other paid staff. Everybody else was a volunteer.

I did that for seven years. I think we did a lot of good things there, and I retired after seven years. The Museum runs an air show in order to fund the Museum. There's a two-day air show every year. So, by virtue of being the Executive Director of the Air Museum, I was the executive producer of the air show, because the air show came under the Museum. So, that's where I got involved in the air show business, which I have really come to love.

Just rolling back, what I missed during the time I wasn't involved with airplanes was the people, really, but, when I went to work as the Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Air Museum, every day when I drove to the Museum, I'd pass the F-106 that the Museum has. They'd painted it up in the exact colors of the squadron I was flying in then. So, every morning when I went in and every evening when I came home, I would drive past this airplane that I loved. Some of my ex-Air Force buddies would say, "You can look out your window and see airplanes?" I said, "Yes, I can look out my window and see thirty airplanes." They'd say, "You're so lucky."

That's when I started flying again. I learned about a guy on the airport who owned a Cessna 172. He was an instructor and he would check you out for a price. If he thought you were qualified, he would put you on his insurance and you could rent his airplane. Well, that was seven years ago and I've been flying his airplane ever since. I still fly it fairly regularly, once or twice a month.

MG: Where do you go?

DP: Well, there's this thing that general aviation pilots like to call "hundred-dollar hamburgers," where you fly somewhere for breakfast or lunch, except with the price of aviation fuel now, it's two-hundred-dollar hamburgers. We're close to the coast here, which is beautiful, so, I'll fly out the Russian River to the coast and fly up and down the coast. San Francisco Bay is just beautiful. If you talk to air traffic control, you can get a clearance to fly over the Bay, Alcatraz, Golden Gate Bridge, the Bay Bridge. You can fly up to Auburn in the foothills for lunch, fly down to Half Moon Bay for seafood. I like to take people sightseeing, just fly for joy, for pleasure. Oh, we used to fly down to Stockton to see Betty's son and granddaughter, but they've now moved from there, but it was a lot easier flying forty minutes than driving two hours.

MG: I do not know how easy this is, but could you kind of tell me how to fly? If I got in my car I would buckle up, I would put the key in the ignition and I would put it in to drive. What are the steps? Would it take too long? Is it too complicated to explain?

DP: Well, first of all, you have to have gone through some pretty extensive training, ground training and in-the-air training. You have to pass an FAA written test, and then, you have to pass a check ride, but do you mean what switches do you actually turn and stuff?

MG: Yes. I actually have a fear of flying. It was not easy for me to get here and I am not the best flyer. I am wondering if maybe you can make me feel better about it.

DP: The thing I will tell you, that I tell others, that should make you feel better--it is far safer to fly from A to B than it is to drive. Whenever we land back at SFO [San Francisco International Airport], Betty says, "Now, the most dangerous part of the trip." Flying has been proven to be far safer than driving.

When I fly, I go out to the airport here, I unlock the hangar doors, roll them open. I check the paperwork first, to make sure that there's nothing in the paperwork that would not make it airworthy. I check to see when it flew last and who flew it. Then, I do a pre-flight. I check the entire exterior, the flight controls. I drain the bottom of the fuel sumps, to make sure that there's no condensation there. I check the oil. I check the fan belts. I check how much fuel's in it. If I'm going somewhere, I've looked at a map to see where I'm going, how to get there. I've looked up the GPS call letters of where I'm going; pull the airplane out of the hangar, close the hangar doors--is this what you had in mind?

MG: Yes.

DP: Close the hangar doors, climb in the airplane, put the headset on, get the shoulder harness, seatbelt, close the door--if it's warm, leave the window open, if it's cold, shut it--go through the checklist, checking all the switches are where they ought to be, circuit breakers are okay. You turn the master switch on. You prime the engine five times with throttle--with the mixture, not the throttle--and then, you call, "Clear," so [that] everybody knows that you're going to turn the prop, and then, crank it up.

You watch the oil pressure come up. That's the most critical thing at this point. You turn the radios on. You bring the flaps up, make sure all the circuit breakers are in, make sure that your rotating beacon is on, that your handbrake is off, and then, you call ground control for taxi instructions.

MG: Okay. Do you ever fly with any good luck charms?

DP: In Vietnam, I had one good luck charm that I still have. I smoked back then. I smoked cigarettes and I had a Zippo lighter that was engraved with something. I don't recall what. It's still downstairs, I can get it, but a small Zippo lighter. I carried it in my flight suit pocket. It was my good luck charm.

MG: Can you tell me about your recent trip to Russia?

DP: Well, ever since I'd been assigned to the NATO Allied Air Forces Southern Europe, which was in the late '70s, mid '70s, I'd wanted to go to Russia. I was not allowed to go back then because it was the Soviet Union and my clearances were quite high. A person with the clearances I had could not travel to the Soviet Union. So, I'd always had it in the back of my mind that if I could ever go, I would like to go.

So, Betty and I had taken one or two Viking River Cruises. We went to Germany, where we saw some of her family on the river cruise. We did one river cruise--well, one down the Rhine and one down the Seine, went from Paris to Normandy and saw the beaches of Normandy, where they landed during World War II. Oh, that was so emotional. We learned that Viking had a river cruise in Russia. So, we looked into it and we decided we would do it.

So, I talked to Viking and they said they recommended going from Moscow to St. Petersburg, as opposed to St. Petersburg to Moscow, because St. Petersburg is more beautiful and more modern and more Western. So, we signed up for it a whole year in advance. You sign that far in advance, you can get some pretty nice discounts. So, the middle of September, just not even a month ago, we flew from San Francisco to Frankfurt. We switched to a Lufthansa flight, flew into Moscow and there I was, in Moscow, Russia. In fact, walking down the jet way, it said, "Moscow Airport." I took a picture, "Moscow Airport."

We toured Moscow for three days. We sailed down the Volga River, stopping at three or four different ports, little towns that I'd never heard of, which were quite nice. We ended up spending three-and-a-half days in St. Petersburg, and it was wonderful. It was just almost an out-of-body experience, standing with my wife in Red Square looking at the Kremlin and Lenin's Tomb and that famous mosque [basilica] there, St. Basil's. It just blew my mind, and Russia was so

different from what I expected. I don't know why, I expected it to be dark and dank, for people to be glum, for there to be armed soldiers all over the place--none of those things. People were happy. I never saw one armed soldier.

The country's beautiful. The museums are fantastic. They had beautiful rivers, parks, trees, green all over the place, and the people are so nice. In one town, we actually, in groups of ten or fifteen, went into a Russian home, a local Russian home, where they gave us homemade vodka and tea. Saint Petersburg is just lovely. The Hermitage Museum, you could spend a week in there. So, Russia was very, very nice.

MG: Good.

DP: I went back to Vietnam about four or five years ago, too.

MG: Wow. What was that like?

DP: Well, I'd never wanted to go back. As I said, I've had no holdovers or PTSD from the war, except for loud noises, which I may have always had, I'm not sure. I never had any reason to go back. I mean, I had no reason not to go, but I had no reason to go. Then, I started reading about guys who had gone back and it was a very good experience for them. For some, it meant closure. For some, it meant all kinds of other things. John McCain, who was a POW for seven years, went back.

A local tour company here, run by a woman we know, organized a trip to Vietnam and Thailand. I said to Betty, "What do you think?" She said, "If we can afford it, let's do it." So, we did, and it was such a good thing to do. We spent several days in Saigon. We went out into the Delta Region on sampans, that I'd only flown over. Then, we spent several days in Hanoi and, again, it was different than I expected. I learned that once the government of Vietnam allowed tourism that the whole country had changed. Saigon, which is now called Ho Chi Minh City, was modern. We stayed in the most beautiful modern hotel, with glass and brass and chrome and people. Everybody seemed happy, and there were tens of thousands of motor scooters. Again, I didn't see any armed guards. Hanoi, while not quite as modern, was the same way and people were happy and were nice to us.

So, I talked to some people, both in Saigon and Hanoi. This one young man who was in this car that I hired to take me out to Duc Hoa--I wanted to see what it was like; it was totally different, totally different--he said, "Do you mind my asking why America was here? Why were you here?" And I said, "Well, hmm--well, we were asked to be here. We were fighting North Vietnam taking over South Vietnam, and there was this thing called "the Domino Theory," that if South Vietnam fell, all the other countries in Southeast Asia would fall." And he says, "Well," he said, "all the rest of the countries didn't fall. The North did take the South over, but, now that we've opened it up, nothing's much changed. Our economy is a capitalist economy and the Communists that run the country are like a political party," he said, and I thought about that.

So, I went up to Hanoi and talked to people there, talked to a guy who fought against us and we became friends, actually. He said the same thing. He said, "People here are happy. We're not

oppressed. We don't have this autocratic rule." I got to thinking about it and I said, "It's a shame 55,000 people had to die," 55,000 people on our side, who knows how many on the other side, but, in a way, our goals were achieved. They're free. They have a free economy. They're happy and they're not oppressed.

So, I didn't go over seeking closure. I didn't go over looking for that, but I got closure. I always used to say, "The only war I ever fought in, we lost." I don't say that anymore. Although militarily, thanks to the politicians in Washington, we didn't have the outcome we wanted, in the end, as I just said, they're happy, they're free, they have a free-market economy and they're not oppressed. So, we achieved our goals and, for me, that's closure. It's just a shame so many people had to die.

MG: I know that at least one of your sons is following in your footsteps and went to the Air Force Academy.

DP: Yes.

MG: Can you tell me what they are up to?

DP: I have two sons. The older one is--they're both in computers, don't ask me exactly what they do, because I don't know. One's with Cisco Systems in San Jose and the other went to the Air Force Academy, served for five years, got out, got a master's in computer something, joined the Air Force Reserves, lived in Colorado Springs for a few years. His company folded during the tech bust and he went to Austin, Texas. So, he's down in Austin, Texas, still in the Air Force Reserves.

MG: Are you still affiliated with or working for the Pacific Coast Air Museum?

DP: No, I retired from there two years ago now; actually, August was two years. I retired at the end of August 2012, handed it over to the new folks. Although I know a lot of people there and I'll meet them for lunch from time to time, I don't go back to places I left. I'm not comfortable doing that. I don't go back to Beale Air Force Base, I don't go back to the Utilities Department, I don't go back to the Pacific Coast Air Museum. I feel like it's their time now. I'm yesterday's news, but I do stay involved in the air show industry, because I was in charge of the overall production of our air show for eight years. I've stayed involved in the air show industry, gotten to know a lot of people. I go to the annual International Air Show Conference every year. I was the Air Operations Director for the Truckee Tahoe Air Show this past summer, which I really enjoyed, but it was a lot of work. I've also been asked to be Air Operations Director and help bring back the Lincoln, CA, airshow.

I'm still a ski patroller up at Squaw Valley. I continue to be a ski patroller, which I love, and I am a volunteer with the California Highway Patrol here. So, I stay pretty busy.

MG: It sounds like it.

DP: Yes.

MG: What would you say your favorite thing about flying is?

DP: The feeling of freedom, the feeling of freedom and, "I'm responsible for it all." I went back to Rutgers in 2011; no, 2012.

MG: What was the reunion like?

DP: I didn't want to go. First of all, it's a long airplane flight back, a long airplane flight out and back. I worked all through college. I didn't know hardly anybody, and I'd never gone to a reunion. I'd never gone to one. I didn't want to; I don't know why, I just didn't. I didn't know that many people.

Tom Siegel, who I mentioned earlier, our class correspondent, he and I went to high school together, college together, and he worked for me in the Air Force as an attorney. He said, "Come on, it's our fiftieth and we're going to be inducted into," whatever that is, I can't think of what it is anymore. So, I went. It was really a worthwhile thing. We really enjoyed it. Betty and I went. I saw guys that I'd played baseball with my first year of college and I saw all kinds of people. It was a good thing everybody had nametags. We also spent some time in NYC, visiting museums. So, it was a good thing to do. I enjoyed it.

MG: Good. I will be in the area for the next twenty-four hours, so, if I drive away and you think of a few stories you wanted to tell me, I can always scoot back.

DP: Okay.

MG: That is really not hard to do.

DP: Okay.

MG: Thank you so much for your time and your service. This has been a pleasure.

DP: Well, I've enjoyed it. Thank you very much.

MG: Thank you. I will turn this off.

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Reviewed by Jesse Braddell 1/27/2015

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 5/22/2018

Reviewed by David Pinsky 6/30/2018

(Note from David Pinsky, June 2018): This oral interview with Molly Graham took place on October 11, 2014. I did not make the time to review and return it. Then, on October 9, 2017, almost three years to the date of the interview, our home and all our possessions were lost in the horrific Tubbs Fire firestorm that consumed over 5,000 homes in Santa Rosa and the surrounding

area. We lost everything, including 26 years of Air Force mementos, scrapbooks, awards, etc. Some of these would have made adding more accurate detail to this oral interview much easier.

We are now in a new home and moving on with our lives. We lost so many things, but the memories cannot be taken away. I appreciate Shaun Illingworth, Director of the Rutgers Oral History Archives, reaching out to me and sending me a copy of the draft October 2014 Rutgers Oral History Interview for my review. It turned out to be the book about my life that my wife has, for years, urged me to write and that I will leave my children and grandchildren.