

Interviewee: Strang, Guy
Interviewer: Jack Sigler
Date of interview: July 13, 2007
Category: Vietnam (Casper Platoon)
Status: Open
Tape location: Box #55

Sigler: Good afternoon, Mr. Strang, do you understand that this interview is being recorded?

Strang: Yes.

Sigler: Why don't we start out by telling me what you were doing just before you got in the service? How you got in, how you ended up with Casper Platoon?

Strang: Okay. Well, I graduated from the University of Maine in 1967, class of '66; I extended for a year, but because of that extra year, I spent five years in ROTC. So I got my commission out of ROTC summer camp at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, following my last year in college. I also had three years of high school ROTC, so I had eight years of Army before I was actually commissioned. And I knew that Vietnam was coming on; by the time I was midway through college it was building up. While in college ROTC, I took a contract with the government to go to flight school. I actually had my pilot's license before I graduated. I graduated from the University of Maine in May, 1967, went to ROTC summer camp in June, 1967, and got my commission on July 28th of 1967, then active duty on August 7, 1967. It was a whirlwind affair; no breaks, just travel time between stations.

Sigler: They really hurried you along then.

Strang: They did indeed. I went to the Army Engineer Officer Basic course at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Sigler: That was your basic branch of ROTC?

Strang: Yeah, Corps of Engineers. By 1968, the Army would take anyone into flight school who could walk. So with a contract to fly, I awaited my flight orders. When they didn't come, I called the Pentagon, asking when I would go to flight school. And they told me, "Ah, didn't you know? You flunked the physical." And I said, "How can that be?" "Because you're over the height limit." (I was 6'5" – the height limit is 6'4"). And I said, "Oh, but you knew that when I was in the college ROTC flight program. I have a contract to fly." And they said, "Well, son, the only way you're going to go to flight school is to go voluntary indef." So I volunteered to change my obligation to the Army from three years to voluntary indefinite just to get to go to flight school.

Sigler: So the Army breached their contract?

Strang: Yes, that was my first taste of the real Army. But, I didn't really mind being forced to go voluntary indef, because I was planning to be a lifer anyway. In fact, I applied to be a Regular Army Officer at the time, but was only allowed Vol Indef.

Sigler: What do you mean by Vol Indef?

Strang: Each commissioned officer has an obligation to serve in the Army upon receiving a commission. I was obligated to three years of service on active duty and three more in the reserves because I had accepted an ROTC scholarship while in college. Flight school graduation would have been another three year obligation, but it would have run concurrently with my previous obligation. My three years would simply have been extended from the date of my graduation from flight school. However, the Army determined that my obligation from flight school should be more than three years. I was told that I would go to flight school only if I "volunteered" to serve an "indefinite" number of years; hence the term "Vol Indef." Army officers graduating from West Point are appointed as Regular Army officers. They are automatically "Vol Indef." "Vol Indef" officers are released from active duty at the pleasure of the President. Some get RIFed (Reduction in force) because the Army is overstaffed and others get extended because the Army needs their services. But, either way, their obligation is indefinite.

Sigler: Okay. So now you are a commissioned officer at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. What did you do after the basic officer course?

Strang: I waited. I expected my orders to flight school to come automatically and immediately after graduation from the Engineer Officer Basic Course. But, they didn't come and they didn't come. I was afraid that the Army was going to assign me to something I didn't want to do, so I went looking for a job. The rumor was that new second lieutenants with nothing to do would be assigned to Courts and Boards. I wanted nothing to do with being a trial lawyer, so I found a job as the Supply Officer for the Fort Belvoir stockade. Yes, I was going to jail. I worked inside the stockade compound. My assistants were all inmates, each one looking to use the new lieutenant to try his sob story on to try to get out of jail free. It was a unique experience. I worked for a Major in the MPs who answered directly to the Post Provost Marshall. He was very good to me and we enjoyed a great relationship for about three months. During that time, I played basketball on the Fort Belvoir division basketball team and traveled with the team with the Major's blessing. It was a great experience. (Did I mention that I had been the starting center on the University of Maine's basketball team my first four years in college?)

Sigler: So, you finally got orders to flight school? What happened then?

Strang: I'm on active duty; I was a 2nd lieutenant and as soon as I get approved for flight school, I leave Fort Belvoir for the primary phase of rotary wing flight training in Mineral Wells,

Texas, in January of '68, and I finally got in to flight school, I think in the February class of 1968. How much detail do you want about my arrangements there?

Sigler: Oh, anything you think is interesting to you and to future historians. Where did you do in flight school?

Strang: Fort Walton in Mineral Wells, Texas, was just outside of Fort Worth. That was the primary phase, and then I graduated from that and I was transferred to Hunter Army airfield at Fort Stewart in Savannah, Georgia. The most interesting thing that happened at Fort Walton is they started me off in a T-55 trainer, which is the smallest rotary wing training aircraft in the Army. At my height there was no way I was going to solo in that thing, and the instructor pilot knew that before I even got in the aircraft, that I wasn't going to be able to fly that thing. So it took him about a month to convince the higher-ups, and by that time I was ready to solo. There was no way I could solo in this aircraft, so they recycled me. I lost a month of training; I went through an extra month of training. I got to wait a month, but they transitioned me into the T-23, which is a little larger aircraft. I set a precedent because from that time on the Army assigned training aircraft based on height, rather than alphabetical order. [laughs] So I set a precedent for the Army there [laughter]. I got to Savannah's Hunter Army airfield and transitioned from gasoline helicopters into a jet turbine Huey. Graduated from there in October and met my future wife on a blind date while I was in Savannah. We got to know each other through the mail from Vietnam, and I spent my 30-day leave before I went overseas with her in her house. I got to know her family a little bit, got to know her better. Then I took off for Vietnam, left the States on December the 6th of 1968, and arrived in Bien Hoa and stayed about a month in An Khe, going through the jungle school and some other stuff. I finally received orders to be assigned to the 173th Airborne Brigade, and their aviation unit, called "Casper," as you're well aware. I arrived in Casper sometime in January of '69. So I spent the entire year of '69 in that unit. At the time I arrived, my commanding officer was a Captain named Stan Streicher. Stan had been in the country already about two and a half years, and I was just amazed that a person could stay in Vietnam for that long, because I didn't anticipate staying more than a year. I was going home. [laughs]

Sigler: Well, that was too long, wasn't it?

Strang: Yeah. But out of the seven and a half years I spent on active duty, that year in Vietnam was probably the best of the seven and a half. I enjoyed it immensely because we, as an organic unit of the 173rd, followed no rules. We were not part of the 101st Aviation's SOP and did not have to worry about the 1st Aviation Brigade rules and regulations. We did essentially whatever the battalion commander wanted us to do. When I arrived in the unit, I think I was the first commissioned officer that Stan had at that time (I may be mistaken but I think I was the first one). All the other officers were warrant officers, so I was the only commissioned officer we had at the time, followed shortly by one William Bassignani, whom I had gone to flight school with. We were both 1st lieutenants at the time. And so Stan assigned me to the (UH-1) Hueys and assigned Bill to the (LOH-6) Loaches. We had eight Hueys and six Loaches. The Hueys were used almost exclusively for command and control missions. The

Loaches were used primarily for their offensive weapons. We had mini guns mounted on the Loaches.

Sigler: Oh, I see. And you turned them into assault helicopters.

Strang: Yes. Essentially, that's correct. And they flew in tandem, in teams. But my responsibilities, which were scheduling and flying missions for the Hueys (and we almost always had six on standby and two in maintenance). I tried to schedule them so we would get the proper maintenance on them. But you always had at least five available at a time, and one on reserve. So it was six Hueys on standby any given day. The six Loaches were available virtually every day; the only time they were down was for necessary maintenance. They flew entirely different missions. Bill was in charge of the missions for the LOH-6s; I would assign each battalion an aircraft and a pilot, and they belonged to the battalion commander for the day.

Sigler: I see. So the battalion commander had an operation responsibility.

Strang: Exactly. The aircraft commander is responsible for the aircraft, but the battalion commander was responsible for the action on the ground and he flew in the back seat – or his S-3; one or the other would be in the back seat, the other on the ground. But our missions were essentially just to do whatever that battalion commander wanted us to do. And as a result of that we flew probably every type of mission you can imagine from resupply to extraction and insertion of LRRPs to resupply to medevac, even gunship support on occasion with our M-60s. Our mission definition or descriptions were virtually unlimited. They were all determined by the need.

Sigler: But directly under the control of the battalion commander.

Strang: Right

Sigler: Now, was there a permanent assignment to the different battalions? Not assignment, but attachment to the battalions?

Strang: No, the only thing permanent was the crew chief belonged to the aircraft and *vice versa*. But other than that, the pilots changed daily, the ships changed daily, just depending on what was available and what the need was. But the only attachment was that the crew chief belonged to his aircraft. That was Stan Streicher's SOP.

Sigler: Right. So, in your job you were flying as well.

Strang: Oh, yes. I logged over 1,000 hours of combat time during my tour of duty. I have thirty-two air metals to prove it.

Sigler: Yes, but you were basically mostly doing the scheduling assignments for the Hueys.

Strang: Correct. I had been what might have been an S-3 if the platoon had had an S-3. I'm not even sure how many people we had on our daily morning report.. I would guess that at any given time we may have had as many as fifty, but I really don't know for sure.

Sigler: That would be about right, yes. Having talked to a lot of people – not a lot, but several of the guys in that platoon. There was something between forty-five and it may have gotten close to sixty occasionally, but that would be, you know, overlaps, replacements, and like as well.

Strang: Well, we were very seldom short of people. We had a pretty good flow in and out, so there was never a shortage that I recall. We could have used more aircraft, but we had the personnel. In the year that I was there we turned the Huey's over once and turned the Loaches over twice.

Sigler: You mean the equipment itself?

Strang: Right. When we got them shot up and replaced them.

Sigler: So you flew all sorts of different types of missions on this thing.

Strang: Yeah, you name it, we probably flew it.

Sigler: Well, how often was it command and control as opposed to any of the other type missions?

Strang: Well, all were command and control, except our reserve ship. Usually if the ground command did not need us for the day, we would fly what we would call "ash and trash" missions, where we would go down to Tuy Hoa or we'd go down to An Khe, we'd go to Qui Nhon, which was our major supply base, and we'd pick up C-rations, pick up supplies, pick up things for our own unit as well as things that the commanders needed and so on. And those missions, although they count as combat time, would not count with the same emphasis that you got an air medal for as combat time. We didn't even count those missions, for all intents and purposes. We also did some training missions. For instance, every new pilot that came in had to fly with an experienced one for approximately two months before he got to be an aircraft commander himself.

Sigler: So you always had a surplus; you had more pilots available than you had aircraft.

Strang: Correct. That distinction was true whether it was an officer or a warrant officer. They always had to have a period of time under the oversight of an aircraft commander.

Sigler: Did you find any real difference in flying capability between the warrant officers and the commissioned officers?

Strang: No. No. They all went to flight school, all with the same aircraft. It's just a matter of personal desire how efficient you want to be as an aviator.

Sigler: So one thing, you said the battalion commanders used these aircraft on missions – how about the brigade commander? Did he use —

Strang: Well, the brigade commander had his own. He had a personal aircraft and personal crew, and we very seldom saw them; they were actually parked in a different area of LZ English than we were.

Sigler: Okay, so he wasn't even part of the Casper Platoon as such?

Strang: No, he was on the morning report, that's the only distinction. We very seldom saw them.

Sigler: Oh I see, so he was actually technically part of the platoon, but you never saw him.

Strang: Correct. He had his own billet, as a matter of fact. He didn't even live with us. And I say he – there actually were about – I think there were six of them, six pilots and probably as many crew members. But their ships were in a different location. We didn't do any maintenance on them, we didn't arm them. The pilots belonged to those ships and those were pretty much a permanent status. And the reason there was six of them, we had one ship that was stationed in LZ English for the personal disposal of the brigade commander who was a Major General, and the same Major General —

Sigler: He was a Major General by that time?

Strang: Yes. I beg your pardon, let me think about that for a second. The division commander is a major general, the brigade commander would have probably been a one star.

Sigler: Yeah, well, I've talked to people who were part of the platoon earlier and the brigade, and it was a somewhat more fluid situation then. The brigade commander would fly with whatever aircraft was available at the time and things like that, so it seemed to get a little more fixed, institutionally, as time went by.

Strang: By 1969, the generals had made themselves very comfortable. [laughter]

Sigler: Generals tend to do that.

Strang: Yes, they do. He had a nice little billet in a mobile home – make it a double wide. But again, he had an aircraft stationed at LZ English, he had another aircraft stationed at Tuy Hoa, and another one at Lane Army Airfield. I'm not even sure where that is. But there were aircraft at his disposal.

Sigler: Okay, and these were even above the normal eight Hueys at LZ English?

Strang: That's correct. The eight that I talked about belonged to us, and those were at LZ English in our weapons area. And also there were a couple of Loaches that we didn't see. In addition to the six that we had in our revetment area, there were two others elsewhere, and I don't know a thing about them; I don't know what they were doing. I know a few of the pilots that flew them, but again, they were on our morning report but we never saw them.

Sigler: And so they were over on somebody else's mission someplace.

Strang: I'm under the assumption they belonged to the general, too. What the general did with all these aircraft is anybody's guess. [laughs] That is not privileged information for me.

Sigler: He had his own little private air force.

Strang: Yeah, there you go. Now when you contact the major – I think his name is Doug Haviland – I don't know if he has volunteered to speak or not, but he was the brigade aviation officer when I was there in '69, so he would know the details of that.

Sigler: Okay, I will make a note on that, bring it up with him. And you flew virtually all these different types of missions at one time?

Strang: Oh, yeah. Mostly at night [laughs]

Sigler: Using night vision equipment?

Strang: No, didn't have any.

Sigler: Didn't have it yet?

Strang: I have landed aircraft to a cigarette lighter in the middle of a dark jungle, because they didn't dare let us put the lights on because the enemy may shoot us on the way in.

Sigler: So, that got a little hairy, didn't it?

Strang: It got exciting, yes. What we call the "pucker factor."

Sigler: Yes. [laughs] Now, what was the big battle the brigade was in on Hill 875?

Strang: Oh, that was back well before my time.

Sigler: Yeah, it was before your time.

Strang: I think it was '68.

Sigler: Yeah, so you were in there when it was a whole lot of little battles going on, basically.

Strang: Yeah. As a matter of fact, after I got there, I don't know exactly when but sometime in that summer of '69, we went from being aggressors to being a pacification program. And I went from living underground in a bunker to building barracks and living in billets above ground.

Sigler: Oh, my goodness. So it was when the cease fire had taken effect?

Strang: No, not the cease fire. This was the pacification program. These were the days when Anthony Herbert was under fire. General Barnes fired him because he was being aggressive during a time when the United States government didn't want us to kill any more Vietnamese.

Sigler: Yeah, well that's just because he was trying to get talks underway. So you got two types of operations there?

Strang: I did indeed. It was quite a transition. It was really a night and day type of thing. The hostilities didn't change a great deal for us. I mean our fire support base, LZ English, didn't receive as much incoming fire as it had previously, didn't get the mortar attacks they were accustomed to getting. With the pacification program – those things kind of ceased – so we began building buildings; we built permanent BOQs in our revetment area.

Sigler: Uh-huh, and were those intended only for American forces or —

Strang: Oh, no, just our crews. These were for our crew chiefs, and gunners, and officers. They'd been living in, well, like I said, I lived in the operations shop which was an underground bunker. There were some above ground buildings but they were GP mediums built on platforms, primarily.

Sigler: Yeah. So it looked like at that point the intention was to stick around for a while.

Strang: Oh, yeah. LZ English was pretty much a permanent base anyway. It was located at Bon Son on the I Corps/II Corps border. Now each of the battalions had their own fire support bases up on the ridge lines where they fired their artillery, and most of our missions were concentrated on taking the commander back and forth to his fire support base and his troops on the ground. The commander could direct his artillery and his ground operations. We had one mechanized battalion and four infantry battalions. And a lot of our command and control was just boring holes in the sky while our commander was talking to his people on the ground.

Sigler: I've heard (I wasn't there so I don't know), a certain amount of criticism about command and control from the air, especially when battalion commanders or brigade commanders bypass the next echelon and go down to the platoon and tell them what they're

doing wrong. You ever heard that kind of an argument?

Strang: No, not really. I can testify that there's an awful lot of wasted time, flying those guys around and doing nothing. In fact, I remember one occasion when the three [S-3] of one of our battalions was in the back of my aircraft, and the commander was on the ground with one of his troops, and the S-3 was bored and we just happened to see a deer on the ridge line and we decided to go deer hunting [laughs]. We went on a deer hunt while the battalion commander was down on the ground —.

Sigler: Running the battalion —

Strang: Yeah. As far as the criticism is concerned — in the aircraft we're monitoring three different radios all the time, and there's constant traffic on those, and the communications between the battalion commander and his staff on the ground is pretty well only related to combat. There's not much gossip, not much waste of communication going on, so I didn't hear any criticism of the kind you're talking about while I was in the aircraft.

Sigler: What were the other two channels you were —

Strang: We had a UHF and two fox mikes.

Sigler: And those were aircraft to aircraft?

Strang: Yeah. One of the fox mikes was used in the back seat by the battalion commander to talk to his ground troops. The other one was used for aircraft communication with our headquarters. And the UHF was primarily for navigational. There was also internal communication within the aircraft so you can talk to each other, the crew and so on. And the battalion commander back in the back seat.

Sigler: Okay, while you were there, did you — well, you of course got down to Saigon from time to time —

Strang: I only got to Saigon one time.

Sigler: Only once?

Strang: And that was an "ash and trash" mission. I don't even recall what we were doing at the time. I used it as a training mission for a new pilot. We were doing cross country navigation, essentially. Even though I didn't stay — I didn't stay the night. I just flew down, shut down the aircraft, refueled, and come right back again.

Sigler: So not much down time except with the unit itself.

Strang: Yeah, not much sightseeing. I did manage to get three R&Rs. You usually only

got two, but Stan Streicher must have felt compassion or something and gave me an extra one. I went to Hong Kong, where I proposed to my fiancé over the MARS.

Sigler: Oh, wow. She came out to Hong Kong?

Strang: Oh, no. I proposed to her over the MARS station, on the radio. But she did say yes, so — [laughter]. We managed to get married after I got back. So when I was in Hong Kong I proposed to her first and then I went to the PX and bought all kinds of stuff and sent it to her. So I had to fulfill my commitment because she had all my stereo equipment, she had all the china, she had a ring, she had the only car in the family, so I had to marry her. (That's a family joke!)

Sigler: You were in the great supermarket of the world in those days

Strang: Absolutely. I shipped her silk and all kinds of stuff. One R&R was in Sidney, Australia, and then the third one was an internal or local R&R in Vung Tau, which was a kind of resort for the troops in Vietnam.

Sigler: Where is that, down on the coast?

Strang: Yeah, it's close to the delta, just southeast of Saigon some place, I'm not sure exactly where right now, I'd have to look at a map.

Sigler: Yeah. That's okay, I'd just never heard of that before.

Strang: Vung Tau had a reputation of being owned by the US Army during the day and being owned by the Vietnamese at night.

Sigler: Oh. [laughs]. I've heard it said there's a lot in Vietnam that looked like that.

Strang: [laughs]. Well, I didn't mean Vietnamese, I mean Viet Cong. Viet Cong owned it at night.

Sigler: At that time, was the Viet Cong still the primary enemy or were you going against the North Vietnamese regulars?

Strang: There were some regulars – in fact, I've got about 1,200 feet of 8mm film I shot through the chin bubble of the helicopters — mostly as a pilot in the early stages of my tour. In those early months we were aggressive. But I remember one was a shot of a Vietnamese regular Army officer who'd been killed. I have a picture of the dead body. But quite frankly, we didn't see – I didn't see all that many enemy soldiers until they were dead. We carried a lot of corpses out. We had a fire support base that was overrun and our troops had lowered their cannon and fired some grapeshot into the wire and tore those guys to shreds. But they were trying a last-ditch effort – the enemy was getting pretty desperate because they'd been starving out in the An

Loa Valley. We had been denying them access to the local people, so they were having a hard time surviving. They were cut off, pretty much cut off from supplies. We didn't do it, the Air Force did. But they pretty much cut off the supply line, so the enemy was kind of isolated in the An Loa Valley. Our loaches helped out by patrolling the An Loa Valley in teams of two aircraft; one lead ship to draw fire and the other to fire up anyone stupid enough to fire on them. I mentioned earlier that we had mini-guns mounted on our loaches. They were a force to be reckoned with because a mini-gun can put a round in every square foot of terrain from a few hundred feet in the air and they spit out something like 4,000 rounds per minute. Bill Bassignani was shot down in August of 1969 and he and his door gunner were killed while flying one of these patrols. So, although we were having some success getting the Viet Cong to surrender, it was still dangerous in the An Loa Valley. And again, this was during the pacification program, so we had a lot of psych ops missions, which is another one of our battalion commander's choices. We'd get these big loudspeakers on the aircraft, try to convince them to surrender.

Sigler: Did it work?

Strang: Yeah; we got quite a few prisoners of war.

Sigler: What were you using, recordings? Vietnamese language recordings?

Strang: Well, we actually had translators. I think in our S-3 shop we had a couple of people who could speak the language. And they used them pretty much on these psych ops missions. We'd go out at night, primarily, and just go up the An Loa valley, blaring on the way into these loudspeakers. Telling them that their cause was lost and it's time to give up, and we'll give you some food and water, come on in. Then in the morning the troops would go in and then mop up.

Sigler: And to a certain extent, that at least worked?

Strang: It worked to a certain extent. I don't know how extensive it was. Again, being up in the air, we don't see much of what's going on on the ground.

Sigler: So this would have been the first part of '69 pretty much.

Strang: Right, right. Well, what we just talked about, the psych ops, would have been the latter part of '69, when we were in the pacification program. In the early stages we were out there shooting them up.

Sigler: [laughs] Well, you know, you make it sound like we were actually winning at that point.

Strang: Well, I felt pretty good about the war. I didn't know we were losing until I got home.

Sigler: Were we losing?

Strang: Well, in terms of body count, the whole concept behind Anthony Herbert trying to kill Vietnamese was to get Congress a body count. He was a warrior, he wanted to kill these people. And he would construct assaults against villages and lay the bodies on the beaches. We could see them as we flew over: here's the Vietnamese we killed. And from the standpoint of body count, them (as) opposed to us, we killed a whole lot more of them than they killed of us. One of the missions we had was medevac. And again, let me give you an example of how this works. In the 1st Aviation SOP, in order for a medevac ship to leave the hospital and go into the jungle they've got to have two gun ships accompany them. The battalion commander sitting in the back seat of my aircraft got a call from one of his company commanders: one of his soldier's been hurt and we need to get him out of there; that battalion commander was not about to wait for a medevac ship and two gun ships to depart from some outside area someplace when we were right there. Yeah, we were right there and we could go get him, and he said, "Go get him!" And we would go in whether the LZ was hot or cold; we'd go in and get that guy out of there, and we probably saved more lives than those medevac ships did – of our own troops, that is.

Sigler: You mean working for command and control?

Strang: Yeah

Sigler: Just supporting the battalion directly.

Strang: Right, exactly. And, again, the only protection we had was our two 60mm machine guns on the aircraft. You know, if the company commander on the ground tells us the LZ is hot, he would lay down suppressive fire while we were coming in. Then we'd snatch that trooper out of there as soon as we could get him on board and get out of the LZ. And we had the wounded soldier back at the B-med, which was our hospital, before the medevac ship was even cranked up.

Sigler: Right. So, that's proving now to save lives, the faster you move them into medical attention there is a larger chance they're going to live.

Strang: Absolutely. Matter of fact, I remember one case in point where we were supplying one of the fire support bases up in the mountains, and one of the troops had stepped on a punji stick. Now that's a major infection; those punji sticks were urinated on, defecated on —

Sigler: They did everything they could to make them septic.

Strang: So we got that kid back to the hospital well before the medevac ship could have gotten him.

Sigler: And so — medevac, command and control, ash-and-trash missions —

Strang: One of our favorite missions was insertion of LRRPs- Long Range Recon Patrols.

Sigler: Okay, were they part of the regular battalion, or did they —?

Strang: Yeah, they were part of the brigade. Now I'm not sure if they were a separate part of the brigade or if each battalion has its own, but we looked upon them as being rangers, essentially. But they were 173rd Airborne Brigade troopers. But they were usually a squad-size, which means about seven men, packed and loaded. I mean, they were loaded to go out there for a week to two weeks. And so we would take these troops – fully armed, fully loaded – out to a mountain ridge in the middle of the night – no lights – put them down on the ridge as best we could find a spot to lay them in there, drop them off. And they were on their own until we came back and got them. And usually we'd come back and get them, after they were screaming bloody murder, "Now come get us! They're all around us, come get us!" But they loved to see us coming when they'd been flushed by the enemy.

Sigler: What was their mission, primarily?

Strang: They did patrols. And again, I'm not privy to that kind of information so I'm guessing, but I think that it was to break up the supply lines. It was essentially routine patrol.

Sigler: But actually combat patrols.

Strang: Oh, yes. Yeah they were looking for the enemy. They called them recon patrols, but who knows what they were doing. But some of them did engage in actual firefights.

Sigler: And so you guys would take them out, get them off, and get them back out again.

Strang: Right

Sigler: And you said sometimes you actually did gunship support.

Strang: Well, that was a rare occasion, because we had an inorganic company called "Cowboys" or "Lucky Stars" or maybe both – I can't remember – but they were actual assault helicopter companies. They were in general support of the 173rd. We were 173rd. We belonged to the 173rd.

Sigler: They were in direct support – with Apaches–

Strang: Well, back then it was Cobras.

Sigler: Cobras, yeah, okay. But again, the gun ships —

Strang: Right. And they had Slicks. They were geared to a combat assault, which means they had Slick ships that dropped the troopers in the LZ while the Cobras were flying gun

support over their heads. But these are full blown assault helicopter companies.

Sigler: But occasionally you people got yourselves into that business, too.

Strang: Yeah. I'm trying to think of the mission I had flying guns. We were supporting a medevac ship, I think. I remember the medevac had to use a McGuire rig to get this trooper out of the jungle, it was so thick. They couldn't land anywhere close to him so they had to wire him out.

Sigler: Okay, McGuire rig is one of the baskets they used to go up —

Strang: Right. And we didn't actually fire our guns because there was no enemy to see. We're talking about triple canopy jungle; we couldn't see them anywhere unless they were on top of the trees. But we were there just flying support for them.

Sigler: But a Huey didn't have that much in the way of armament, did it? Just a couple of M60s on the sides.

Strang: That was it. The gunners also had M-16s and the pilots had two sidearms.

Sigler: Two what?

Strang: .45s.

Sigler: So you're not really equipped for that kind of a mission.

Strang: No.

Sigler: Okay, so you were there about a year, essentially in charge of the Huey section of the platoon, and you managed to get yourself engaged in the process. [laughter] So, okay and then back to the States?

Strang: Yeah. I left the same way I came in. Actually I went out Cam Rahn Bay. I actually left Vietnam on December the 6th of 1969, and flew back into — yeah, I came back the same place, Oakland. And I flew from Oakland directly to Indianapolis to meet my fiancé, spent my 30 day leave with her planning the wedding.

Sigler: Then how much longer did you stay in the service?

Strang: I got out of the service in January of '75.

Sigler: So you had about five more years in it.

Strang: Yeah. As a matter of fact, when I came back from Vietnam, my next assignment

was back at Fort Belvoir in the Engineer School as an instructor for about six months. I spent that entire six months trying to get a transfer up to Davison Army Air Field. I did not want to teach school, I wanted to fly.

Sigler: They move you back to your primary branch, then.

Strang: Right. But I finally got the opportunity to get back into flying, and Davison Army Air field was the Priority Air Transport, called PAT, Priority Air Transport for the Pentagon. We had both fixed wing and rotary wing. And that was a really great assignment. We went from flying under no rules to flying in Washington, DC. [laughter]

Sigler: There are a few rules around there.

Strang: Yeah. A “few” rules isn’t the right word.

Sigler: But you had your helicopter pad there right there on the side of the Pentagon.

Strang: Well, we were stationed over at Davison Army Air Field. We flew in and out of the Pentagon, but our aircraft were all at Davison.

Sigler: Davison – where is that? Down by Belvoir?

Strang: Yeah. That was a nice assignment; I enjoyed that assignment.

Sigler: But you were in before they created aviation branches and such.

Strang: Correct. In fact, when I got to Davison Army Airfield, the volunteer Army was just coming into being. And my boss at the time (I’ve got to think about my dates for a second; this was 1971-72 thereabouts, when the volunteer Army came in). And I worked for this Lieutenant Colonel who ran that airfield and the executive officer was a major whom I really, really loved. I mean, we got along great. And he made a comment to me about that time frame when I was intending to get out, and he said to me, “Guy, you really need to stick around. This volunteer army’s going be something else.” [laughter] He was right, it was something else. So I did stick around for a couple more years after that. And I left Davison Army Airfield in 1972, in the fall, and then back to the Army Engineer School, this time to be a student in the advanced course. While in the advanced course, I received orders to Fort Campbell to get my command assignment. I commanded a company of engineers for a year. 101st Division. And the 20th Engineers were general support. They were not 101st. 101st had their own engineer company.

Sigler: Okay, so it was general support.

Strang: Right. I got to Fort Campbell – now this was the post in CONUS that has the most number of aircraft. And we’re talking about 101st Air Mobile Division. There were 800 helicopters in this 101st division. In the year and a half that I was stationed there, I didn’t get

one hour of flight time. I got my flight pay but back then the Army was in the austerity program, and they cut all the extra training programs.

Sigler: [laughs] What a downer.

Strang: Yeah. I drew my flight pay, but I didn't have time to fly anyway. My company command kept me busy. I spent nine months of my twelve months building an airfield out in the boonies.

Sigler: Oh boy. [laughter] I assume that Campbell has changed a whole lot since the days I was there.

Strang: Oh, it looks like a college campus, now.

Sigler: It used to look like an old, yellow, wooden barracks. You know what I'm talking about? At least it did when I was there.

Strang: Oh, it was when I was there too. We worked in those old white wooden buildings that were already decreed to be demolished. But they never were; we used them. But now they're gone. There may be a few of them left.

Sigler: Okay, so you ended up spending about what, four years in the service?

Strang: Seven and a half.

Sigler: Seven and a half?

Strang: August '67 to January '75.

Sigler: Well, you were just short of that point where you have to make a real decision about retirement.

Strang: My dad told me I was a fool. "Seven and half years in, twelve and a half years to retirement. You're an idiot for giving this up!" But the thing that forced us out of it essentially was that this company command was the worst year I spent. If I had not had a good first sergeant and a good XO, I probably would have been relieved because I and the battalion commander did not see eye to eye on anything. We were always in conflict. He was trying to run my company for me, I was trying to tell him – whatever. Anyway, job satisfaction was a principle ingredient, but secondly we had a child on the way! And we decided we did not want an Army Brat, so we decided to get this career over.

End