

Interviewee: Smith, Kennedy M.
Interviewer: Jack Sigler
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Sigler: Mr. Smith, you understand that this interview is being recorded?

Smith: Yes, I do.

Sigler: Okay. Why don't we start by you just telling us where you were before you got into the military, how you got in, and what went on from there.

Smith: Well, I graduated from college in 1954 and I faced the draft. They had the aviation cadet program. I'd flown some before and I always wanted to fly, and this was a good way to spend a tour. We had to face twenty-seven months draft at the time. Aviation cadets, if you washed out, you just finished it off. So I came in that program, was an Airman Detached at sergeant's pay while we went through primary and basic and were graduated as a 2nd lieutenant.

Sigler: In the Air Force.

Smith: In the Air Force. Went through advanced into interceptor training, moved up, went into ADC and spent my whole career in the Air Defense Command. At the time, about 1968, they had called most everybody up, and so I volunteered to go to Vietnam. I'd been stationed at Tyndall Air Force Base, air defense training command down there. I was a maintenance officer, flying -106s, -102s and T-Birds.

Sigler: All fighter aircrafts.

Smith: Interceptor aircraft, and that's what they did, the training down there. What I did as maintenance officer, I was in quality control. I flew flight test maintenance. After heavy maintenance, we test-flighted the aircraft. It was interesting. Well, 4000 hours and all the take-offs and landings were _____[?]. So I had a good tour. A lot of people in ADC cycled through for weapons training and things like that at Tyndall, and the pilots were normally — Tach did all the bombers and they flew all the F-4s and things like that.

Sigler: The Tactical Air Command.

Smith: Yes. And they kept their people. ADC fed people in and they wound up as FACs and things like that.

Sigler: FAC — Forward Air Control?

Smith: Yes. A lot of people circulating through the training down there and had been overseas, and they talked about the A-1s as a terrific airplane. It was a mission where you could shoot down the _____[??] bombs and do things like that. It was a prop aircraft, kind of heralding back to the Snoopys and the Spads.

Sigler: Or at least World War II.

Smith: Yes. So I volunteered and just managed to get a slot in the A-1s. And this was in 1968, as a major. We went through training over by Hurlburt, which was right next to Eglin. We did all our training in guns, bombs and that, and checked out in the A-1s. The A-1 was quite an air machine. It was designed at the end of World War II for a Navy aircraft, combat support, and was a carrier aircraft, big heavy-duty thing. It was made by Douglas – folding wings. Carried a big load, could carry 8000 pounds of armament and fifteen stations to mount it on, and you carried bombs, rockets, whatever they wanted you to carry just about. It was a single engine, 3350, two rows of round cylinders, had a big sixteen-inch prop, had lots of torque and _____[??].

Sigler: Necessary for carrier aircraft.

Smith: And something to hide behind. Had good armament. Had a neat ejection system that we had zero capabilities, zero to – we could bail out on the ramp. And it had a racket system that pulled you out of the aircraft and dragged your chute out, and you could land safely.

Sigler: Again something necessary for a carrier aircraft especially.

Smith: Well, this was added after, this was a late edition, and saved a lot of people. All in all, it was a good airplane to go to war and you could fly with a canopy over you, like all the carrier planes did.

Sigler: Now was it a single person crew or double?

Smith: The A-1H was a single place, but we had a dual cockpit version, the A-1E, and it also had space in the back for about five people. It was a multi-purpose type airplane that developed, that they could hang a radar thing on it, they could do quite a few things – and they did during its life. We just used it sometimes, well, to check people out. This gave you a way to have a dual control and you have a kind of an instructor pilot go through special missions and things like that.

Sigler: You were near Eglin training on these things.

Smith: Yeah, at Hurlburt. Then we headed over and after jungle survival in the Philippines, at Clark, then went to Saigon – not Saigon but – yeah, checked in at Saigon and then we went to Bangkok and flew around to NKP, Na Khon Phanom, which was part of the out-

country war. I had an interesting tour, as the fact that I saw both sides of the war in Southeast Asia. I was in the out-country war, flying out of Thailand over Laos and South Vietnam and various other places. Then I spent another half of my tour down in IV Corps in South Vietnam along the Mekong. That one was a Headquarters thing, in a direct support center for IV Corps, air support center. So I got to see both sides and be in Vietnam itself.

Sigler: Now the base you named was in Thailand?

Smith: Yes. I've forgotten how many bases that the Air Force had in Thailand – _____ [??] and there was a couple others. And we had NKP, which is Na Khon Phanom, and it was located on the northeastern side of Thailand on the Mekong River, right next to Laos. Laos goes all the way around the northern part of Thailand. We did our work out of NKP into Laos, and we interdicted the trail, Ho Chi Minh trail, and we had some missions that went on over into South Vietnam along the DMZ and places like that. We had multi- missions.

Sigler: When you first got there, were you bombing north of the DMZ at that point?

Smith: No. We couldn't survive in that environment. We were a slow mover, max speed 350 miles – knots. It carried a lot but it was a World War II ground support airplane. It took its hits if you were in an exposed – in other words, daylight bombing and things like that.

Sigler: Against prepared positions of anti-aircraft.

Smith: Right. Yes. You had losses. But I'm kind of getting ahead of myself. But the environment we flew in – we were night interdiction. We had three squadrons there. Two of them took general missions and night interdiction on the trail and one flew up in the _____ [??] and northern Laos, _____ [??], and supported some of the Laotian troops against the Vietnamese. They also had the SAR mission, search and rescue. That's a complicated mission and people have to grow into it to control aircraft and things like that. So that squadron handled the daily CAP mission. They had two airplanes on CAP up over near the Plaines des Jarres. And if somebody went down or something like that, they would be the on-scene commander and start the search and rescue, which was a big element.

Sigler: And provide fire support for the actual rescuers?

Smith: Right.

Sigler: CAP stands for Combat Air Patrol.

Smith: Yes it does. Thank you. We went into NKP – it was a kind of a unique air base. It was like going back to World War II. There had been a 9000-foot air strip put in there, like the ones at _____ [??] and other places. Soon after it was completed and the monsoons came in, the runway split in half. So they had a useless 9000-foot runway. So we

were flying off a 5000-foot taxi-way, with three-foot wide ditches that were also about three feet deep running down the side. Everything operated out of those. So C-130s could handle those because those are short field take-off. They didn't have any problem with it. And our other aircraft were small or short-term. It made things interesting in a way. We just had that one runway. The base – when I got there I was quite surprised about it. Everything from the gateway and all the buildings and that, everything was made out of teak. There were nice barracks, mess halls, the whole thing. It was like a boy scout camp. That was my impression from the very beginning and I said, "Boy." [Laughter]

Sigler: What a war.

Smith: Aren't we fortunate?

Sigler: Had the base been built by Americans?

Smith: Yes. It was plush. We were very fortunate. Had air conditioning in the barracks. We flew twenty-four hours, and we flew nights. I spent most of my time on night missions. But there were three A-1 squadrons there. We were the Hobos.

Sigler: Do you remember the unit designation?

Smith: No, I don't. I should have looked that up but I didn't. We also had quite a few other missions at the base. We had A-26s. They carried what they called "funny bombs" and did missions on their own, on the trail and all.

Sigler: Now "funny bomb." I've not heard that one before.

Smith: Well, they're little bomb-lets that you drop when you're in anti-personnel, and cover a wide area. Good for troops in contact and things like that. We had – what was it? The porters. Very short-term, stall aircraft. Short take-off and landing aircraft that I believe some C and A people, that sort of Air America people, flew out of there. And they had some other aircraft that had speakers on them and threw pamphlets out. Then we had army people coming in for insertions out of there.

Sigler: Whole lot of special activity missions out of there.

Smith: Yes. It was a very interesting base. We had a CH3 detachment, the Jolly Greens, and they had—

Sigler: That's helicopters.

Smith: Helicopters. And they had a pad at the south end of the runway, off to the side. And they were the ones that went out on the rescue missions. Let's see, that covers just about all

the things going on there. And they later had the — they brought in a little Cessna aircraft. It was a relay aircraft, and guys went up and flew up about 25,000 feet and just sat up there.

Sigler: Can you get a Cessna that high?

Smith: They were up – they had oxygen, and they sat up there and flew orbits for the whole tour, and they were relay. That was a daily mission for those guys.

Sigler: Just to get the world's highest antennae. [Laughs]

Smith: Exactly. Thank you. I'm trying to keep the thread going here. So all in all, it was a fantastic place to operate, launch out of. Our mission on our Hobos, we had the night mission and interdicting the trail, Ho Chi Minh trail. And soon as it got dark, we launched and made strikes against trucks and that.

Sigler: They used trucks on the trail?

Smith: Yes. It was quite a thing there. That trail was an ongoing operation.

Sigler: Yeah, I've heard much about it, but I've never understood exactly, and that it was terribly important for their logistics.

Smith: Yes. In fact, I've heard recently that there was another trail possibly paralleling it and nobody knew about it. They did a lot of things there. In fact there was a fuel line all the way from North Vietnam all the way down to South Vietnam that supplied for all their trucks and that. You never hit a tanker. Of course, nobody ever saw a tanker. But they had run a fuel line.

Part of our problem was we were so involved in gadgets to win the war and electronics. We had Task Force Alpha at NKP, and it was a big, super-secret building complex that had all these antennas that tied into listening devices. They'd send choppers out and drop these specialized listening devices along the Ho Chi Minh trail so they could track trucks and movements and help organize their night strikes, because you couldn't have somebody out there all the time. So they relied on those things.

Sigler: Did they work?

Smith: They did some work there, but it — the biggest problem is that we relied so much on these electronics and super deals, we didn't have enough people on the ground looking and seeing what's going on. And that's how they built the pipeline, that's how they ran everything. Our biggest problem, we underestimated. We didn't respect our enemy, and that's what defeated the United States. It really did. I think we see a little of it at the beginning of the Iraq war, first one and second. We get so carried away with our mighty might that we don't appreciate the fact of people.

Sigler: Yes. Now was Task Force Alpha run by the Air Force or by the Army or by the CIA?

Smith: It was I believe the Air Force. There was a quite a mixture of people, I think, super-sleuths and things like that were involved with it. Our missions, besides the night interdiction, we also had escort missions to insert people along the trail. We always had to fall back – whenever somebody got shot down, the war stopped and everything was aimed at getting that individual out. We were slow movers and could work better with troops in contact because we were more accurate than the fast movers, the F-4Cs and that thing. The -100s, they were moving so fast and so little time on the target that they couldn't necessarily be relied for accuracy. So with the A-1 coming in, it's slow, rolled in visually, sight, track a target, where we could come in low and lay it very accurately.

Sigler: Did you work with ground controllers on those kind of attacks?

Smith: Well, that was the idea. What you had in the SAR missions – you ought to find somebody that was into that SAR mission. And very interesting, they could tell you a lot of stories and a lot more accuracy than I can. I never participated. I remember I was a ground alert with a load of anti-personnel gas with a mask, a gas mask, with me, but we were never used.

Sigler: What kind of gas? Tear gas?

Smith: It was heavy anti-personnel.

Sigler: But not a poison gas.

Smith: No, no. But I imagine it would wipe people out if they were trapped. Like I say, all kinds of missions. But the SAR mission was very important. But unfortunately for every person we got out, we lost either a plane or a person, a PJ. PJs are the crewmen that flew in the Jolly Greens, and they ran the hoist and the jungle penetrator that came off the CH-3, went down through the trees — so you're dealing in 300 – well, 200-foot trees, and that's a high canopy and to pick up someone off the ground, the penetrator has to go down. A lot of times the crew chief was on the penetrator and rode it down, especially if a man was injured.

I might talk about our night interdiction missions. I'll use this example of what it was like, you know. It's night. There isn't a light out there except if there's something burning on the ground or a flare or what they call logs, and they were a ground marker. And we had FACs that were flying in what we called Push-me Pull-mes. They were light aircraft – I've forgotten who made that. It was had a propeller in the front and a propeller in the back, carried a crew of two, pilot and an observer. They acted as FACs on the – we had a few of them operating out of NKP. Most of our FACs were in -123s, C-123s. That's a small cargo plane, prop-job, with booster jets. Man lying in the back on a mattress with a night scope, spotting on the trail with heading indicator and altitude. I don't know whether they had a repeating altimeter or not.

Sigler: You hadn't started to use infrared at that point? You spot with a searchlight, the infrared searchlights?

Smith: Oh, no.

Sigler: I thought they were much later.

Smith: No. We just had the old night scopes, the green thing that — quite popular now. But that was how they tracked them, the tracks on the trail. And they had flares and they had these logs that were a slow-burning marker and _____[?]. And they would drop the marker down either next to or as close as they could to the targets they were after. Then they'd say, "Go two nape-widths or so far off of that northeast or whatever. And you'd pick up that and you'd see the mark and you'd roll in on it and drop — we were carrying eight napes, napalm, 500-pounders. They were finned and that made them more accurate. Some used un-finned napalm. So that's why we could hit things. So we'd drop one and we had something to go to. We had a mark and a nape, a big splash down there.

Sigler: But you actually never saw the target until you were just—

Smith: No, unless you were under flares, and you'd have an opportunity if you were quick to see, and you'd drop on that.

Sigler: So you really had to rely on the forward air controllers to get those.

Smith: Yeah, exactly. We would roll in. We'd either do a 30 or 45 degree angle dive, and you had to know what the terrain elevation was. You got some information from the spotters or you're working off your map, and we had TAC in so we knew where we were. And we could look in—

Sigler: TAC in, tactical navigation?

Smith: Yes. That gets you radio and distance from a station, and you can plot it out in points where you're going or what you pre-plot and say, "I have to go on this radio and so many miles out." Very nice.

Sigler: Keeps you from flying into the side of a mountain occasionally. [Laughs]

Smith: Yeah. We had mountains out there. They had _____[?]. It was made out of old limestone, and the water percolating down through was acidic and it made huge caves in those things. So these trails running down — the Ho Chi Minh trail was really going from cave to cave or paralleling it, and they had all these storage tanks. That brings up the — one night when one of the other squadrons was bombing some trucks and one of their napes didn't kill the truck fully, it just set it on fire. And this truck just kept going, burning away. And

the guy drove into a cave. Very shortly they had this huge secondary explosion and it continued for three days. It had that much fuel and munitions in it, plus we helped things along because we would drop various things on there to add to the fire, and we knew what to shoot at. It was all those — we're talking about 700 to 1000-foot hills, maybe. The terrain varied, but just riddled with caves and one case we won. [Laughter]

Sigler: Big time.

Smith: Yeah. Going back, this bombing is — to give you an idea — you're in a closet, pitch black, standing on a step ladder, and you see one or two cigarette butts on the floor under the closet. And you're up there with a luminescent spit ball and you're throwing those at those cigarette butts. [Laughter] So using the napalm was a good weapon because it made a wide splash, covered a big area. Plus being, you had some accuracy. Once you got one marked down there and you had something to go on, they'd say, "Oh come two nape-widths left, right, forward," and you started getting pretty accurate. But you'd roll in, you had your periphery sights set up and you had the — you rolled in, you pre-set your rudder a little because you went from, say, 170 miles an hour up to about 300 when you dive. And you're headed down and so you're looking at the pipper and you also got an eyeball on the altimeter. _____ [?]; you already know the when you got a —

Sigler: Pipper's your sight?

Smith: Yes. And you got to make last minute adjustments. You don't want it skidding or anything like that, and everything's settled down and then you trigger it off and then start your pull up and go left or right and come in with a pilot, full pilot. You look back maybe and see what happened, but you're mainly pulling up and off and if you hadn't gotten any attention before, now you called the ground. You're getting ZPU, 22mm —

Sigler: 23.

Smith: 23 that's right. 23mm, and it just comes up like a hose, a hose with dashes in it and kind of loops around. Then 37s — there's always a question whether there were six shells in a series or seven. And 37s would go on up, they had an explosive charge and they would go off. If they didn't hit you, they'd go on up. But those were tracers. So you ran into all of this coming up and you're moving out of the way and climbing back up. Then your wingman, he was rolling in, in from and they'd usually tell you what — you were flying a circle, the Indians. [Laughter] And coming in from one direction or another. The FACs would tell you, "Well, you're close," or "You need to go over here," or what. But they'd also tell you the preferred direction to go in from or something like that.

Sigler: Was the anti-aircraft permanently mounted in locations or were they on trucks?

Smith: I have no idea. I think some of them were permanently mounted and I —

Sigler: Emplacements.

Smith: Um-hm. And I dropped some frags one night – I got a red puff like it had gone right in the —

Sigler: Magazines?

Smith: Magazines, yeah. One night – a wild thing – this CPU was coming up and I heard — people do dumb things. That’s what gets people in trouble. So I just hosed back. Just gave him an arm _____[??] guns and gave a short hose of those things back at that CPU’s tracking me and I pulled off. I forgot – I had tracers, too. [Laughter] Didn’t do that again.

Sigler: Murphy’s laws of combat – if the enemy’s within range, so are you.

Smith: Yes. I remember one night along this sort of line, it was in the fall or growing season – in the fall they burned the fields, the rice fields, in preparation for the next crop. And the whole area’s just covered with thick dense smoke. You have to work around that sort of thing. It’s low-hanging but you got to move through it to get down, and can’t see very far. And when you fly in it, it’s like being in a milk bottle. You just look out and it’s white; your cockpit’s suddenly very small and you’re just surrounded. It’s like swimming in soup or whatever. But we’re on a trail and we had a valley there and set down in so the valley had a high terrace on either side and you’re coming in and flying over that. We’re working with flares. So I rolled in, came out of the clouds, quick sight what I’m supposed to see down there _____[??] something and pull back up. And as I’m pulling up, I looked back, all this light and you could see the ground and all, and turned my head to the side and got the worst case of vertigo I’ve ever had in my life. And I’m pulling – and I’ve got a pretty steep angle – and what has happened is I’m looking at my altitude indicator and it doesn’t make sense to me. And that’s your primary means of flying in weather. And this thing is on the _____[??], tilted up, on a steep angle, starting into a bank. But I can’t find the sky pointer telling me whether I’m up, down, sideways or what. I’m totally disrupted. That vertigo can do that. They say, “believe your instruments,” but it’s —

Sigler: Frightening.

Smith: Very frightening, almost nauseating. And I’m pulling off and I have to kind of get the nose down. I don’t know what’s going on. So I unloaded the stick, put on kind of a zero g on the aircraft and put it into a roll. I rolled two times, a fully loaded aircraft, and finally it was headed back down a little and I got the sky pointer under control and I pulled off and paused.– because I didn’t know whether I was going to lose _____[??] or not. And that was good for a _____[??].

Sigler: Did you fly with a wingman or were you basically flying alone.

Smith: Normally, yes. We went often in pairs. In this particular night, my wingman had trouble with his cockpit lights and I sent him home. I said, “This isn’t worth doing that,” and it gets any worse or you have your lights go out and try and fly with a flashlight when you don’t have to. And landing with a full load is hazardous but it’s not that bad.

Sigler: You wouldn’t drop the load before you landed?

Smith: No, we, at times, recovered. I have a comment on that. [Laughter] I had an interesting tour.

Sigler: I bet.

Smith: So I managed to finish out the strike on that target but I was a little shaky for a while. Well, talking about heavy weight for landing with armament – one night we were out, and it was a marginal night for weather and a front was coming in. So they had a recall and we’re all coming back in with full armament on board. And that’s a 75-foot runway with the ditches on either side. Down there in Thailand around the Equator, they’ve got the biggest thunderstorms. Out at Tyndall, I used to fly, and they had some thunder bumpers on up to 60,000. When I flew a -6, I zoomed up to 50,000, and they went on and on. But in Thailand, those things just went, I think 70,000 feet, and then they’d have these humongous bolts of lightning. You could see them from miles away and they looked like – just huge things. And even the small puffy clouds, we were drilling, flying around about 4000 feet and had all these little shelf clouds, and every one of them had lightning in it. [Laughter] They just lighting up and all over the plane. And we had to hold out till everybody got their turn to fly in and come in and land. We had a fairly strong wind coming up. It was a strong cross-wind. Fortunately we were landing to the north and it was coming from the west, and just coming in to make the wheels landing, and this wind started blowing the aircraft off to the side. I just gunned the engine – and this aircraft with that big prop has terrific torque, and that torque, which works to the left, just picked me up and set me up, lined me up with the runway. And touched down. Made a wheels landing.

Well, when you took off and went full military, you had two and a half points on your rudder cranked in just to correct that torque on that engine. That’s a 3350, it was a big engine, and you had a big _____[??] You had flip a switch to arm. They would drop off unarmed, and people’ve done that. You flipped the switch and then there were arming wires and there was a — held on at the arming wires. As the bomb dropped off, that pulled the pin off the bomb and then a propeller on the bomb —

End of Side A

Smith: One day I caught mobile control. What this is, is a little glass trailer that sits outside the runway and you check over the last minute check-over of aircraft as they taxi out. See that there aren’t any armament streamers still on there or everything’s pretty well — you’re only looking at one side of an aircraft but you do that. And then you also do a gear check on

people on final, make sure that the landing lights are on indicating that the gear's down and locked. I had a flight of two Catbirds or Cybers, and one got off and the second one got halfway down the runway and aborted. And there were no barriers or anything at the end of the runway, and he ran off the end of the runway and crashed and went down into that three by four ditch and immediately started to burn. He had the canopy open and he tried to get out, but he didn't release his parachute harness which tied him to the seat and he fell over the side and was hanging upside down on the side of the airplane. I could see him. There was a Jolly Green pad and a trailer down, a _____[??] trailer down there at that end of the runway. Next thing I knew, I saw a man running out, trousers, t-shirt, no shoes and a knife in his hand, and another man running to the Jolly Green bird, and he was starting up the helicopter, the CH-3. And the other one ran up the wing – there was fire all around. The _____[??] was starting to cook off. And —

Sigler: 20mm.

Smith: 20mm. And that had a 300 gallon fuel tank, so there was lots of fuel all around. They got the chopper airborne and he just tilted it up, and with the downdraft, kept the flames away from the cockpit area. And the other man cut him loose and they ran away from the airplane. And as they did, the chopper backed off, and within seconds or what, the whole thing blew up.

Sigler: Wow, what a rescue. Two very brave, very smart guys.

Smith: It was something. And more things like that happened.

Sigler: How long were you in Thailand, a year?

Smith: No. I was there about six months and I got — I flew about 90 - 98 missions, _____[??] missions. And we got a call for — we had a whole bunch of majors. They were blue 2, blue 4s and things like that. We had a bunch of LCs.

Sigler: LCs?

Smith: Lieutenant Colonels. While it was a good mission, [Laughs] and everybody tried to get in there. But they took three of us majors on each one of the squadrons. And they needed us down in IV Corps in their direct air support center. They had to have officers for some validating missions and things like that. [microphone movement covers speech] — possibility that _____[??] might wind up in one of the forward air control bases that were scattered. They had about four of them down in the delta. Now we weren't FAC qualified, so they had an in-country forward air controller school at Phan Rang, South Vietnam, which was about midway on the coast of South Vietnam. So we all three of us went over there and went through Snoopy school.

Sigler: Snoopy school?

Smith: Yeah. And checked out in the O-1, single place — or it was a two place observation plane —

Sigler: “I-wing.”

Smith: I-wing, 200 horse engine on it, had full instrumentation and carried eight Willie Pete rockets for marking.

Sigler: Willie Pete – white phosphorous?

Smith: Yes. And we had good radios in them. So well we spent a week or so there, checking out, firing, marking targets, learning how to run the O-1s, and just the FAC business in general. And then while I was there, I was introduced to the war because that was the first time I'd encountered incoming. And for whom it may concern, that is just what it is. Fortunately they were unaimed rockets. They put those things out on the hills and put some kind of a delayed ignition device that either water evaporates and then when it goes, why, there's a contact made and it fires off without anybody around. And that was how they were doing those. Just general harassment. We went through those for a couple nights and it kind of reintroduced me to the real war. Up in Thailand, we really did — you could go into town and go see a tailor or get some boots made and things like that. And eat at the local restaurants and ride the taxi back and not worry, it was just a peaceful operation. South Vietnam was a war-time situation and a whole different atmosphere. You always wore a sidearm under your field jacket and you — if you went to a restaurant, you checked to make sure they had heavy screening on the windows and you were careful where and when you went. We were assigned to IV Corps headquarters. It was the army headquarters down there and it was at Can Tho city which was out, right on the Mekong. The army had quarters there but there wasn't any room except for senior officers, and so all the people had to live on the economy. And Can Tho city was a nice Vietnamese city, though. Lots of nice size buildings, clean – some of them. I lived in two different places, a two-story arrangement, and another one, we lived over a tailor shop. There were about ten guys. We lived on the third floor; the tailor's family lived below us. All those apartment buildings had roof gardens or patios built on the top. So you could go up at night. We didn't have air conditioning of course, so you could go up at night and enjoy the little breezes that there were and you could watch the people putting in strikes off out in the distance around the city and different action going on. It was an entirely different world.

Sigler: Interesting, though, to sit on your roof garden and watch combat over on the edge of the city.

Smith: Yes, yes. They were really far out. The South Vietnam, the IV Corps was just one continuous rice paddy with canals crisscrossing the area. When I got there it was part of the monsoon season and the whole area was slowly filling up. And it just became a big lake, wall to

wall and as far as you could see. In various places, you'd see small hills of cars sticking out of the mud flats or the paddies. We had a small airfield at Can Tho city and we flew out, had two O-1s there and we flew courier missions out of there and went out to the various bases, Forward Air Controller bases. Had one right on the Cambodian border, and then one down on the seashore down at the far end of IV Corps in Vietnam there, and then one off to the east near the Mekong, more towards Saigon. Hauled a lot of people and paperwork and stuff like that. We really didn't get in to putting air strikes in. We got oriented to the area and call signs and things like that, but we were primarily at IV Corps. _____[??], where the place was, was IV Air Direct —

Sigler: All those acronyms.

Smith: Direct Air Support Center. And we gathered to were all the requests for strikes and they flied the missions, the strike missions out of there for IV Corps. The army requests, the Vietnamese requests, and the B-52s and all that sort of thing.

Sigler: You coordinated all those requests.

Smith: Yes, that came through that area. And we had what we called "Dial-a-War" and everything was sent — we had to send out the coordinates in code and you changed your code everyday, and you're dialing in the codes to keep that going. It sounds simple but mistakes can be made. And you had to double check your work.

Sigler: Or that you could be bombing your friends.

Smith: Like a 1000 clicks off. And fortunately, it was out in the jungle, but it was serious. Twenty-four hour operations, twelve on, twelve off. And could eat at the army compound or you could eat on the economy or cook in your hooch. With the ten of us in there living in that apartment, it was good company and it was relatively safe. You're downtown Can Though city, plus we had an armory that wouldn't _____[??] — automatic weapons, pistols, a few grenades, Willie Pete grenades, all sorts of things stacked around. But you never knew what could happen in the city or something like that.

Sigler: There's no rear area.

Smith: And that was very true. There's a whole different atmosphere that you were living under. The people were nice and all that, but you know, you don't know who they're working for. But it was an interesting — flying out over the different bases and things like that. I saw one operation down near the Cambodian border. We were flying in an O-1 and they had a combined bombing and Vietnamese Army operation. The VC were coming across from Cambodia and over across the paddies, and there was a big mountain of karst [??] just sticking out of the mud there, full of caves, and they were using it as a stopover point. So they ordered up an air strike of B-52s, and they had three cells of three aircraft each, wall-to-wall, some 150

pound bombs on it, hard bombs. And they drove in and they dropped those things on them. Blew them out of that karst [??] and we flew off and the Vietnamese Army troops and a couple of tanks down there and started moving in towards that. Here come the VC out of the weeds, out of the caves there, probably a little deafened, but just came out and held them off.

Sigler: Still there and still fighting.

Smith: Yep. Now I always wondered why they didn't consider nape. If they'd put the 500-pound napes, fin nape, on those -52s and dropped those, the same number, on that karst, all that napalm would have gone down in the caves and the whole thing —

Sigler: It would have just sucked the oxygen out of the caves.

Smith: And burned out the oxygen and gotten a good share of those people and made it untenable.

Sigler: Because they did use that often in the Pacific, World War II, to get the Japs out of their caves.

Smith: Well, yeah. They used the flamethrowers.

Sigler: Flamethrowers, yeah. I don't think I've ever heard of a heavy bomber dropping napalm.

Smith: Well, it's a little dangerous. [Laughter] But why not? I mean, they had wing racks on those -52s. Internal, and they had outside. And they carried quite a load. They had a name for it. If they'd do carpet-bombing out in the jungles and all where the thought were tunnels, complexes, and they would go in and bomb those. And it would be a big carpet-bomb the whole things, just destroyed the whole area. But then the idea was hoping to collapse the caves. They also had a gas bomb that used propane, natural gas, a big tank of that. And they had Willie Pete igniters on this thing, and they'd drop it with parachute and when it hit, the gas was released and after a timed delay so it spread, the white phosphorous went off and set the gas and it made a huge explosion with the force going down because the gas stayed on the ground.

The tour in South Vietnam wasn't bad. Just putting in your time.

Sigler: How long did you stay down there.

Smith: Oh, six months.

Sigler: So your total time was what?

Smith: I just spent a whole year, and one carried on with the other. So I went in '68 and came back in '69. A little grayer; wife didn't recognize me. [Laughter] But it was interesting,

the difference, the attitudes, the whole thing, the out-country and the in-country operations.

Sigler: Yeah, the fact that you were involved in both of them.

Smith: And that's the reason, one of the reasons, I decided to talk about it. I believe that's about all I've got to say.

End

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