

Interviewer: April Blackwell

Interviewee: Butch Tilford

Date: February 27, 2019

Q: So, what led to you joining the Air Force?

Tilford: Well I was a student here at the University of Alabama in 1966. I was in my junior year and when I was in high school I uh was born in August. I was always the youngest kid in class but uh by the time I got to high school they thought I was going to be some great basketball player. So, I was held back one year. That made me nineteen when I entered the university and by 1966 I was twenty-one and I knew I might get drafted, so I took advanced ROTC. Air Force ROTC to get a commission. When I graduated in 1968, I was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the Air Force. I had almost straight A's in college as an undergraduate and was an honor student but I uh, decided to take a year to go to grad school to get my masters before I went to pilot training. So, I did. And I finished my masters work in 1969 and got an MA in history and then by then uh I had messed up my eyes mainly cause I was reading a lot and uh I became an intelligence officer. So, I spent one year, November of 1969 I reported to the Intelligence Training Center in Denver, Colorado and spent nine months going through that to become an intelligence officer and uh and when I graduated I volunteered to go to Southeast Asia.

Q: So, you weren't drafted into, you signed up?

Tilford: No, no I signed up and I volunteered to go to Vietnam and I volunteered for a second tour in 1974 but, the war ended before I could get back.

Q: So, what were your thoughts from the beginning of the war and of the war itself?

Tilford: Well, I was a, I first heard about problems in Indochina when I was about nine years old watching television, watching about the French and Dien Ben Phu. And uh by the time I was in 1961, I watched it as we had gotten further and further involved and uh being a good kid of that era I uh thought we ought to fight it but by 1966 we were deeply involved, and I didn't want to be drafted. However, had I been drafted, I would have served. Uh so I uh took advanced Air Force ROTC, because I wanted to be a pilot. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. And that was the best, I thought that would be really fun to fly a jet, get to drop bombs and all that uh then going to grad school I had only one year cause I had, the Air Force didn't want me to go to grad school, they wanted me to go right to pilot training, but I was in all of the honors societies and I had straight A's almost and uh so they said well you have one year to get your masters because pilot training takes one year too and uh by uh then my eyes were not sufficient to be a fighter pilot so I became an intelligence officer planning to get out in four years. And uh then go back and get a Ph.D. and become a college professor uh but instead I uh stayed in because by the time I was ready to get a Ph.D. which would have taken four to six years, uh there were no jobs in history and so why? I had a very good job. Uh but, I did get my Ph.D. while I was in the Air Force. I was assigned to Washington in 1975 uh to write, work on a fourteen-volume history of the Air Force in Vietnam and it just came right out of the blue. By then I was, I had remarried and uh I was planning to go to law school. My wife was a professor at a college in Nebraska and they had a law school I could go to for free and so I was planning to go to Creighton University Law, but I got this call to go to Washington and I really wanted to do that. Uh, my desire to go back to Vietnam had fallen through because the country fell and uh, so I enrolled in George Washington University on my own. I was working full time working on this volume in the history of the air

war in Vietnam and took courses at George Washington until finally I got my Ph.D. in History there.

Q: So, uh was your father/family a veteran?

Tilford: He was in WWII. Um he was in intelligence. He was in EOSS, the Office of Strategic Services. He was stationed in Cuba for that time. He was involved in getting Uranium samples for the atomic bomb and would go around the world. Actually, he spoke Spanish fluently and uh they disguised themselves as a Columbian tugboat picking up scrap iron scrap metal all over the world just junk, but under that junk was dirt and in that dirt was uranium samples for the atomic bomb. Dad went on and became a Presbyterian Minister. Now, when I went to Vietnam when I volunteered for Southeast Asia my first day of intelligence school I saw a very tall beautiful brunette who was also a second lieutenant and fell in love and uh she didn't go through the same course I did but I waited till she got her assignment which was to Thailand Uhdorn Air Force base. I was about three months away from finishing. I volunteered to go to Uhdorn because of my lifelong interest in Northern Thai history, culture, and religion which really didn't exist, but I followed her there and we got married. And uh so I went, I volunteered to go to Southeast Asia because I was in love. And we were married that year in Southeast Asia. It cost me five dollars to get married. Well, we thought we were going into the import export business and but the guy at the, the Thai guy at the courthouse couldn't really understand English so the next thing we know we are married.

Q: Describe your family life like throughout the war?

Tilford: Well my mom and dad were, and I am an only child, they were in Florida uh you know we in those days we corresponded, we didn't write letters we used tape recorders. And I would

record a message and mail it and it would take about one week to get there and they would then record back and mail it back so that's the way we would get a message back, it would take about two weeks. Uh but uh, we did that. My wife and I lived in an air-conditioned room with a bathroom. I worked nights, she worked days so uh we were together a lot. We did a little traveling up to Northern Thailand. She died of breast cancer in 1981. She was only thirty-six years old, probably from agent orange.

Q: So, what was your time like as an intelligence officer?

Tilford: Well I would usually come in around midnight. Uh we were fighting a secret war up in Laos um the bombing of North Vietnam had stopped but the bombing didn't stop at all it just shifted the mountains to concentrate on the Ho Chi Minh trail. And uh we were flying, we dropped 3 million tons of bombs on Laos um most of that on the Ho Chi Minh trail. But up in Northern Laos we used piston engine airplanes and jets sometimes, B-52 bombers to support the Mong Guerrillas. The Mong are indigenous people. They are very much like Appalachians, uh like hillbillies. They were animists. They worship spirits and trees and rocks and so on. And they are a very fierce people. They kept one to three divisions of the North Vietnamese army tied down up there uh supplying the Mong guerrillas and uh giving them air support and that is what I was doing. So, I would come in about midnight and I would read all of the message traffic and my job was to prepare the morning briefing for the general in charge of air operations in Laos. He would come in at about eight and then I would give him his intelligence briefing. Which would usually last about twenty to thirty minutes with, we used overhead slides and things like that. I would tell him about uh yesterday's activities we did, what we were going to do today, what the enemy resistance would be like, where the guns were. I would give him an

assessment of the bomb damage we had done the day before and what we destroyed. It was those kinds of things. He was really in charge of supporting the Mong guerrillas with tactical air support which is bombing using five hundred-pound bombs, rockets, napalm, cluster bombs, and things like that. And occasionally B-52s. But the Ho Chi Minh trail got the bulk of the bombing and that was handled out of Saigon. Uh, we weren't in charge of that and we were flying 30 B52 missions a day over the Ho Chi Minh trail, each B52 carrying up to one hundred 500-pound bombs which is why so many bombs dropped and so much bomb tonnage went into Laos. It was very ineffective. The bombing we did up north was much more effective cause we were using slower airplanes and were getting now very close through, we had Ford air controllers known as Ravens who flew little single engine planes. I went on a couple of those missions uh and we would fly about ninety miles an hour, it was smaller than a piper cup of the 81 Sessa. It had an eighty-horsepower engine something like that and they were hard to hit. You shoot a smoke rocket down and then on the radio you would tell the pilot see my smoke one hundred meters to the left near the big tree over there and um then they would bomb like that.

Q: How did you get the information of what happened the day before?

Tilford: Well we had a, first of all we had every plane that flies after you land after a combat mission you fill out what is known as an Op Rep Form (Operational Report Form) you tell what your target was, the Ford air controller will have sent a bomb damage assessment, how many bombs fell on the target within fifty meters, one hundred meters, whatever, what the assessed damage was. And so, every mission every plane and we would there would be four to five hundred (mumbled) a day and so I'm looking through that. Uh at night we had gunships AC 130 gunships working up and down the Ho Chi Minh trail and about 5 AM their reports would come

in and usually they were highly inflated truck kills sometimes two or three hundred per night. But, we knew in intelligence we weren't killing that many trucks. Uh the North Vietnamese had wonderful ways of spoofing. They would find old ones and build fires under the engine areas and that would come up on infrared a hot item, so we shoot the same damn truck every night. And it was really a numbers game. The whole damn thing was a numbers game. And uh we knew it in intelligence that we were not winning that I think my epiphany came when a three star general came in and I gave him a briefing, I worked for a two star general, major general, and uh at the end of the briefing this was 1971, he said "Gentlemen, this whole thing in Vietnam it doesn't matter how it comes out, whether the Viet Kong and the North Vietnamese win or lose or the South Vietnamese win or lose what really matters in this war is how the Air Force comes out in relationship to the Army and the Navy." And I thought you asshole, we are losing one or two planes, pilots a day and if what really matters is the budget battle in Washington and that's uh. When I came back from Southeast Asia uh my marriage had fallen apart ad uh everything I had been taught, even here as an officer in ROTC about an officer, word being his bond, that you did not lie, uh that you always told the truth, that was stressed in intelligence school, you have to tell it exactly as you see it and to get over there and to see that we were lying to each other, and we lied to ourselves, we lied to Congress, we didn't lie to the American people, you are allowed to do that uh you can keep things secret and you don't have to tell them the truth but you can't lie to yourself. We had a congressional delegation come in and many of them didn't know we were bombing Laos, so we spent days taking down the maps of Laos and putting them behind maps of South Vietnam to tell them we were bombing South Vietnam. And then we would have to go and get the real maps out and do our job. But when they came in we were "Oh here we are

bombing in South Vietnam.” So, that’s lying to Congress and that’s also illegal. Now there were people in Congress who knew what we were doing but there were people who didn’t. And uh the head of the intelligence committee and armed services committee knew but not the average congressman. Congressmen loved to go on these junkets right before Christmas and load up on Christmas presents places like Thailand and Vietnam. So, when I got back I was uh, I was very disillusioned, and I spent a couple of years really drinking heavily uh I had a new assignment in intelligence its Strategic Headquarters in Nebraska. I was in charge of an office that targeted the Soviet Union uh that targeted air bases in the Soviet Union fighter bases for nuclear weapons. Then I became a briefing officer for the commander and chief of the strategic air command and gave him a morning briefing on the whole world and then I was gonna get out and go to law school but then I got a chance to go to Washington. And I had always wanted to get my Ph.D. and I decided to stay in the Air Force so off to Washington I went. And I got my doctorate and then I taught at the Air Force Academy for a couple of years and then I ended up in Maxwell where I was an editor of the Air Forces professional journal. And then I taught at the Air Commanding Staff College at Maxwell Air Force base in Montgomery and the Air War College and uh I retired and was hired as a civilian scholar and then I became I wrote that book which didn’t make me very popular with the Air Force and uh in fact a lot of people were really hated it and me but the Army loved it and they hired me to be director of research for their think tank and I did that until 2001. And then I had a chance to embrace poverty and become a college professor which I loved. I went to a small Christian college in Northwest Pennsylvania in Grove City College and they let me teach anything I want. They paid me very well. Not many Christian schools are long on Jesus but short on money but not Grove City. They had a lot of

money and very good students. I also recruited for the CIA while there cause my major professors at uh George Washington, one was the director of the History Department of the History Office of the CIA and the other was uh a Russian defector who had uh served and worked for the Nazis in WWII. He guided my uh field in East European and Russian history in George Washington. And so I had all of those contacts at the agency and when 9/11 went down I called my mentor that was in the CIA and I said we've got perfect students here they don't drink they haven't used drugs or anything like that and then you have some of them that were daughters and sons of missionaries and uh we were able to get about a dozen of them in the agency. So, I did that in and then in 2008 I (mumbles) I would come back to Alabama every year and uh was in the summer it was in the summer I would spend a week uh in Montgomery. And on one trip I read I got a book that was titled "The Schoolhouse Door of Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama" by Culpepper Clark and I read it while I was here and, on my way, back and uh I decided I wanted to write the sequel to that uh write a history of the University of Alabama from 19163 to 1970. So, uh I inherited some money and I retired in 2008 when I was 61 years old and uh came back to Tuscaloosa to research and write the book which I did and published it uh titled "Turning the Tide: The University of Alabama during the 1960s" and the university press published in 2014 and that was my fourth book.

Q: What year did you go over...?

Tilford: I went out to uh South to Udorn in October the 3, 1970.

Q: I was born October 4.

Tilford: Really were you in 1970? No, not 1970 you'd be 50 years old.

Q: So, you there from 1970 until when?

Tilford: I was there until October, the second week in October 1971. We did one-year tours.

Q: And then when you came back from that tour you wanted to go on a second?

Tilford: I wanted to go back I was at headquarters strategic air command in Omaha, Nebraska and I hated it. One because they had a good football team they'd beat the hell out of Alabama in the Orange Bowl in 1972 and it snowed. And I don't like cold weather but I uh got married again while I was out there. My wife was a college professor out there at Creighton University in Omaha and uh I was planning to go to law school. Now she didn't think I shouldn't go to law school because I never read instructions and I never read uh directions and I never read regulations and I don't obey any of those things and she knew that what law school was and uh she thought I should get a Ph.D. but in those days, I mean there were no jobs in history and uh but then out of the blue the Office of Air Force History in Washington put into a computer what they were looking for, somebody who was a captain which was you know a junior officer with a master's degree at least in history and who didn't have a perfect record in terms of his attitude which was me and uh work on the official history. At first when I got the phone call I had been working the night shift and I had just gone to bed and the phone rang, and this major was on the other end in Washington and he said, "I'm Major Murphy I'm calling for General Peck the Chief of the Office for Air Force History and would you be interested in an assignment to Washington to work on the fourteen-volume history of the air force in Vietnam?" Now I knew that Samuel Elliot Morrison who was an Admiral uh in the Navy had put together also a Harvard historian the uh big volume of the uh Army or the uh Navy in WWII and Charles Summerset in the history department chair had worked on a volume of submarines, so I knew that this was really a good thing. So, I said yeah uh let me think about it and called my wife at her office and told her and

she said well you've got three days coming up, why don't you get your ass out of bed, go to the airport and fly to Washington and nail this down? So, I did. I got up and went to the airport and bought a roundtrip ticket to be in Washington for three days and that afternoon at four o'clock I showed up to Major Murphey's office and uh in civilian clothes and uh I said, "Hi you talked to me this morning and I'm Captain Tilford from Omaha." He said, "You flew here from Omaha?" I said "Yeah, I did." He said, "Well let me take you to see General Peck." So he did and in those days everybody wore civilian clothes because of the antiwar uh feeling in Washington so he said lets go to the, we were in the Lawn Front Plaza Building next to the Lawn Front Plaza Hotel so we went over to the hotel and had martinis and talked and after the second martini he said you're hired. So, I went to Washington and I had gotten to select what I wanted to cover. I did search and rescue operations cause that's a very good story, how we picked up downed air crews and uh I worked on that. But then I just walked over to GW, actually I wanted to go to Catholic University and become a medievalist because I talked to the head of the history department at Creighton and he said nobody goes into medieval history because it's too hard and you have to learn Latin and Old German and Old English and nobody wants to do that um so he said don't go into American History don't go into something like that so I applied to Catholic and was accepted but I went over there in 1975 in uniform. You could wear uniforms if you wanted to in Washington and I often did because if you wore, if you didn't wear uniform you had to wear a coat and tie civilian clothes and the summer uniform was short sleeve open collar it was cool. I went over there in uniform and met the head of the history department and she said "Oh, we didn't know you were in the army." And I said, "I'm not, I'm in the Air Force." So, she said you have a full-time job and I said, "No ma'am I have a full-time profession, I'm in the Air Force."

And she said well you are still going to have to do the work. I said I know that. She said, "If you're in the army you're going to have to learn to write." I said, "I understand that ma'am uh I'm in the Air Force." And she said, "If you're in the Army you're going to have to learn to think." And I just said shit, and uh I wasn't going to go I just walked out and walked away. And um I was on an airplane with a guy talking to him and he said go to GW. So, classes were starting, and the day people were registering I just walked over with my transcripts. The president of the University of Alabama David Matthews who was by then the secretary of HEW had written one of my letters of recommendation cause he was a history professor here while I was an undergraduate and I just walked into the History Office there at George Washington and said I haven't applied but here's my applications to Catholic. I'm um not going there. Um and my letters of recommendations and my transcript, can I just maybe audit some courses and apply and start next semester. And the head of the history department was very busy, he was an old guy and uh he looked at everything and he said come with me and uh we went to see the Dean and I told him what I wanted to do. And he said step out into the hall and I did and then they called me back in and said welcome to the program you're accepted. And the reason is, is I didn't need money. I didn't need a fellowship and they figured I'd quit in a couple weeks or months and they'd still get you know they would get the money and uh I didn't quit. I stuck it out and I had to learn two foreign languages, pass two tests, take three area exams and then a comprehensive exam. And then I got through all of that and then I had and when I entered I said I'm working on this official history can I use that as my dissertation when I got to that and they said oh you can't do that and I said oh yes I can and this woman who was head of the graduate program there said well you are not just going to hand in some Air Force pamphlet and I said

well ma'am I use original sources and uh every one of my chapters was a term paper and I've made A's on them and also three of them had been published as articles. And she said well you must have had someone directing your work who knows what he's doing. I said well Colonel Shrike, and she said who, and I said Colonel John Shrike and she laughed. John Shrike and she said if he was the John Shrike from Yale who has written the book on mercenaries during the crusades, I said that him. That was his dissertation at Yale, he is also a fighter pilot. Her jaw dropped, he's a colonel in the Air Force and her jaw dropped. But still they made me rewrite it, but I did. And uh it's one of those cases where actually the published book because it was published before I even defended it is probably not as good as the dissertation. But I did rewrite it and uh the defense went very well, it was very easy, and I got my Ph.D. and taught at the Air Force Academy.

Q: What was the climate like in America during the war?

Tilford: Oh well I graduated from college in 1968 um the uh Richard Nixon had gotten the nomination for the Republican Party comeback out of he had lost the 60 election to Kennedy and then the 62 governorship and said that's it I'm not in. But then he worked his way back up he uh got the nomination. I watched the Democratic Convention. I was home in Miami uh and uh it was a zoo with the demonstrations and everything. Uh by that time going to a school like Alabama, a very conservative school but we, if you read my book I talk about the Student Government Association was under Don Sigelman who became the governor and went to prison. He was a Greek. He was a DK, a Delta Kappa Epsilon but the presidents of the SGA were really progressive young men. We had a Dean of men named John Blackburn who was a gruff old gruff kind of guy, dark swarthy guy from Colorado. He got the job of Dean of Man in 1956

following and he got it that summer after Autherine Lucy tried to enroll and couldn't. The Dean at that time was a guy named Louis Corsum and John Blackburn was Dean of then at Florida State. Now Blackburn was from Colorado and had gone to school in Missouri and he was an outspoken integrationist but his job at Florida State, and he went there in 1948 was to integrate men into the Florida College of Women which FSU had been a Florida College for women but he was also very outspoken on the race issue. And so, uh he got this call from Corsum and said how would you like to come to the University of Alabama and Dean Blackburn said, John Blackburn said "Why, you have Ku Klux Klansmen marching in the streets up there?" And he said, "Well if you uh believe, if you say what you believe on the race issue where else would you want to be?" And so, he came, and he became Dean. Now Blackburn would scare the hell out of you. But he had a heart of gold and he took these young radicals like Sigelman and Ralph Knowles and Ed Steele and he protected them. He showed them how to sue the University and he kept them from making the mistakes that you normally make. So, what you have here was the Greek system was headed by the, the machine was headed by these progressive guys who went off and did a great deal of work in the Civil Rights but uh there also was a very small group, mostly of artists, a few gay people who were very well in the closet who hung around uh them and we had something known as the Forum. Uh I was a part of that. It was really supposed to be the political science forum, but it didn't we weren't we weren't uh we weren't an official group. We didn't have any officers no dues, we weren't uh SGA had never given us uh their blessing. We had no kind of tie real to the University, but it consisted of students. Graduate students and undergraduate students' faculty, many of them in the history department uh younger faculty like Hugh Ragsdale who taught Russian History, David McElroy, Joh Ramsey who taught French

Revolution, he was an older guy who came here in 1934. Uh and we would meet every other Thursday night usually at Tom Halls apartment. He was a classmate of mine but one time we met at my apartment or Hugh Ragsdale's house. We met in different places. And we just there were a lot of some girls involved and we would just sit around and drink beer smoke sometimes pretty funny cigarettes. And uh listen to Beatle albums and uh and talk about things. So, uh when Julian Bond, the first African American in the Georgia Legislature came here to speak I had a reception for him at Tom's place and Dean Blackburn came. We got raided by the Tuscaloosa police one night and uh I couldn't believe it they were really into who was underage drinking and people taking beer cans and saying oh I'll pour it out officer. The marijuana smoke was so thick in there you could cut it. They didn't know it. Anyway, there was this, that was what the antiwar movement was like on this campus. Uh we didn't do much in terms of antiwar things. Um but uh it uh it was here. By the time I was a senior I thought we were wasting our time in Vietnam. My father even asked me one time if I wanted to go to Canada. And I said no, I want to fly fighter planes. I said even if I got drafted I would go because I'm an American and you know this is our war and you don't get to pick your wars. We knew that through the battle. So that was sort of my attitude on it. And uh that's how I felt. But when I looked at the people who were draft dodgers and uh people went to Canada as far as I'm concerned, they could stay in Canada. Uh I didn't have any respect for them. I uh I could understand that the war was controversial uh, but I still thought if you're an American citizen you do these things at the ballot box and you don't get to choose which laws you like or don't like. And uh it's like on the abortion issue if you happen to be pro-life like I am well if you're elected to office you're uh and this is a legal procedure you have to abide by the law of change the law and we do that by voting.

Uh so you don't get to say well I'm going to enforce this law and not enforce that law. And uh same way with like sanctuary cities. You don't get to make that decision so one of Trump's solutions is that well we have tried this thing with immigration and it doesn't work so we are not going to do that anymore. Oh yes you are.

Q: So, with your family life in the war, was the tension in your first marriage do to the war?

Tilford: Probably, probably, it was probably a lot of that. She had been married before and I found out later she was a schizophrenic. I don't know how she got into intelligence, but her sister finally told me that she was schizophrenic, and she also had Chromes' Disease. She didn't know it but uh finally the marriage just fell apart and couldn't, trying to get married with two people working twelve hours a day and alternate things in a war zone is probably not the best idea. Uh maybe being young and stupid. But uh she died of uh breast cancer probably from Agent Orange in 1981. She was thirty-five years old.

Q: When you came back how did people feel about veterans?

Tilford: Well uh you would uh I started going to the American Historical Association Annual Convention in 1975. I went in civilian clothes. It was in Atlanta. And it's always at Christmas time and that was my first AHA convention and jobs were beginning to be hard to get but there was a big plannery session on the Vietnam War and it actually had Colby which at the CIA became Head of the CIA. He had been the station chief in Saigon head of the CIA, they had General Westmoreland was there and they had a couple of other people uh on the war. And someone from the antiwar movement and it was quite a ruckus affair. I mean it was in a big auditorium and I was there and uh someone got up and said, "Having William Colby and General Westmoreland talk about the Vietnam War is like having Reinhardt Heidrich and Adolf Hitler

talk about the Holocaust.” And then someone got up and said this was right after Christmas, “Two thousand years ago there was a man born in Bethlehem and he gave his life on the cross so anyone for love and peace between mankind and if we would just accept Jesus Christ many of these problems would go away.” And this was a bunch of historians so there is all of this very embarrassed silence as he sat down and General Westmoreland and kind of everybody up there was like oh my goodness where is this going? And General Westmoreland said, “Well I agree he said uh he said brotherhood is certainly things that are well worth shooting for” And then he kind of said “I can’t believe I said that.” Then everybody left and that kind of broke the tension but oh yeah it was bad. Uh I only ran into, people at George Washington they gave me problems and I went to school in uniform because I was just working in classes where I could. I only encountered one time when someone yelled something like baby killer but I just kind of shrugged it off. But I had a lot of I had a lot of guff from some faculty members uh but uh not, but I also had a lot of friends. My Russian professor was uh had spent seven years in a Soviet work camp as a teenager and a young man and he worked for the Nazis in WWII for then made his way to the West. He was uh he I used to go by ad his name was Vladimir Petrov and we would just talk, and he told me that being Southern is very much like being Russian. You have a tie to your land that is like that like a Russian does. One day I went to see him, and I was in uniform. I used to go about an hour early just drop in his office and we would talk about Russia and communism often how the war and the Vietnam war and anything else. But I saw he had a guest in there and I kind of just looked in and decided I didn’t want to interrupt him and then he saw me, and he said, “Earl Earl come back come back.” And I did, and he said oh come in I want, you to meet someone and he and I did, and it was Alexander Solzhenitsyn. I don’t know if

you know who that is, but he was a Russian poet who had been kicked out of the Soviet Union. So, I got to meet Alexander Solzhenitsyn. But uh GW I a lot of the, many of my fellow graduate students were in the state department or the CIA or the military but they would all quit, and GW knew this. They would accept almost anybody. They knew you get these government people they'll quit, and we'll just get the money. So, I didn't quit. Richard Armitage, I was in class with Richard Armitage, Andrea Mitchell from NBC news in a lot of classes with her. I used to walk her to her car at night because I was always in uniform and rape was about the most popular sport on campus because it was right downtown and uh we had young women attacked in the parking garages. So, would walk her to her car because there was a night class, but I got to know her. But Richard Armitage was in Richard Armitage dropped out. And when they dropped out was the language they'd say. Uh I took German, Russian and you were allowed two um mistakes. One verbal one verb mistake and one vocabulary mistake in translating Russian to English and German to English and you were given forty-five minutes and you would just take a book and you would use something from your area mine was philosophy. Guy names Moe Wallace and said this page and this page forty-five minutes translate. And you were given a dictionary but uh and uh, but you would get two chances to pass and I passed them both on the first chance. But uh that's where they would get you. Uh they were afraid of uh flunking people out for lawsuits. They gave everybody A's almost. Uh but uh they would get you on that. And a lot of people would just give up. We started my class in German we started in Summer. I took it in the summer and I had to take leave, vacation and in that six weeks and I went from yah and nine and da to being able to translate consonants and vowels in Tolstoy in uh nine weeks. And I mean I dreamed in those languages. Uh you were in class three hours a day six days a week and

uh it was uh. We didn't learn to speak it, we learned to read it and translate. Then I did the world's biggest dunk. Anyway, I got through those and then I got through my comps and then my dissertation. And by 1984, when I defended my dissertation my mentor had stopped being a professor at George Washington and became Chief of the CIA History Office. So, I got to know Stansfield Turner who was the Director of the CIA. And uh and a lot of the people there. But, anyway, as I was getting ready to get my dissertation he made me rewrite it three times and he said look, you're an intelligence officer in the Air Force and a Vietnam War veteran someone has even called you an unrepentant Vietnam veteran and uh your working for the Director of the CIA History Office, you've got to be better than perfect. And uh it was. Uh I did, I also was teaching the course of the Vietnam War uh at Maxwell Air Force base. I set up a graduate program down there with the University of Alabama. So, people going to the Air War college could get an M.A. in history military history while they were there, and we had professors come down. And I was teaching the Vietnam War course so uh you the one thing about dissertations is professors don't really need them very much. And uh I got everything in on time. Three weeks before, give each professor, each professor got a FedExed copy at least three weeks before. And after about fifteen, twenty, about thirty minutes after talking about the dissertation someone said well let's talk about the larger issues of the Vietnam War. And so, I just went through book, who had written what, who was on the left what was on the right what was good what was just political. We went through most of the controversial things like the Me Line Massacre and so on. And finally, by that point I knew I was kicking ass and uh they asked me to step outside. Now GW does these things right. Uh there was a professor at Rice who had been a rescue helicopter pilot in Vietnam who also had Ph.D. from Yale in History, Ottoman History. He was on my

committee and he was really an expert on search and rescue operations having done two tours rescuing pilots. He was there, and he was a good friend too. And uh so they asked me to step out and I think I smoked two cigarettes at once while I waited. And about a half hour later uh he told me you know if we are all standing up when you come in its fine. If we are sitting down its not and so uh when they opened the door I could see that everyone was standing, and he had this shit eating grin on his face, but the really neat thing is the professor who was heading the inquisition opened the door said, "Dr. Tilford join us." Everybody shakes your hand and says welcome, but Joe told me that uh they had this long-haired professor in there who was a social historian and I had taken a course from him my first semester and he was new from Wisconsin. And he came in with blue jeans on and sandals and hair down to his butt and he took one look at me and I took one look at him and both of us kind of eh. But I took his course and it was a seminar on the 1920s uh and the first day of class looking straight at me he said, "I see some of you have jobs, but this is a real college course graduate course and I expect you to do all of the reading." And I kind of just went eh he said now next week I expect you to read uh "Only Yesterday" which is a book about the 20s which I had read as a Sophomore and I thought what else. And he said I expect you to read all of it. And I was like that's it? My other course we had three books and seven hundred pages a week per class, but this was only two hundred, but I read it and reread it. I remember we had to do a term paper and it was really the seminar paper and I remember I did mine on a bomber, a tri plane bomber that had been built and uh, but we had to have a draft of it done. We first had to have an annotated bibliography and I asked what an annotated bibliography and I did it. I typed it and had it all of my books I was going to look at and my sources and a critique of them. I was the only who did that. Other students didn't have

it, or they just scribbled something down. And then we had to have our first draft. I handed in a draft that had been typed and then I got a draft from another kid and I just tore it apart. It was terribly written. His research was awful. He used stupid metaphors um and then uh when it came time to turn in the paper I turned in my paper on time. I was the only one who did it was typed. It was twenty-five pages double spaced typed with all the sources and it also had a letter attached to it that it had been accepted by the Referee Journal for publication. I got an A plus. Anyway, as they were my friend told me that we were sitting there and this guy with long hair said well I want to say something about Earl Tilford. So, my friend said I was getting ready to get a knife out and dehumanize him and he said, "I've had him in two seminars, it would be an honor for us to have him with a Ph.D. He was always prepared. He is a fine scholar." And then they talked about football or something. But uh there was a lot, I remember going to the AHA one year and I had to wear, I didn't wear my uniform while I was there, but we flew down on military air so when it came time to go, I think it was in New Orleans back to Washington I had to put on my uniform to fly back on an Air Force plane. I was in the elevator and uh someone was professor, he looked at me in my uniform and he says, "Were you here for the convention?" And I said yes. And he said master's degree? I said yes. He said where? I said well I have two, one from the University of Alabama and one from George Washington which I got once I passed my comps, so I don't really use it. But it's also the same place I have my Ph.D. and he said well you are unusual and I said yeah well, I guess so. I'm not one of the many people looking for a job. Anyway, yeah there was a lot of that. Uh academics can be very narrow minded. And many of them are very narrowly trained. I uh my specialties are American European, Modern European, Military History, Soviet East European Politics and History. But I have in my first

three books were on the Vietnam War. I was one of the early scholars on that going to conferences. Then when I went to work for the Army I had to become a futurist because I had twelve people working for me. Uh six of them civilians with Ph.D.'s five of them Army officers and one of them Air Force officer, all had Ph.D.'s in different areas mostly in areas of study like Russia, Africa and so on. But also, philosophy. Then I had to learn about the future, then came 9/11 and I was teaching at a small college and then suddenly I had teaching in a national security course. I had to find out where the hell is Afghanistan. What is the Taliban? So, I went to Israel and studied at Teliviv University for a summer about terrorism. And I had to become an expert on terrorism. And then teaching in a small college you teach a lot of different courses and uh so I taught courses on the French Revolution, Era of Napoleon, World Wars I and II, Vietnam War, Russian History both parts and uh really I enjoyed and uh and but being an intelligence officer teaches you to handle a lot of material, go through it, figure out what is important, then state it put it in intelligence school put it in a way that a monkey can understand it but you can't um embarrass the monkey and some of the generals I briefed were extremely intelligent men, particularly the Army generals with doctorates and some were dumber than shit. But still wore the stars on their soldiers and you can't talk down to them. So, make it so a monkey can understand it without talking down to the monkey. And uh it also has helped me in teaching. Uh every course I have ever taught, including the one I am teaching now on the Ku Klux Klan I write out all of my lectures, I use PowerPoint or I go through those lectures and I lecture off the PowerPoint but they are every course every lecture has an introduction, three to four main points and under each main point there are three to four supporting points which I then have a conclusion where I tell you what I just told you and I had already told you what I am going to tell

you in the introduction. So that's the way you do it and it lasts fifty minutes and I time it, so it does. But uh it taught me to organize and uh it, so I've got several teaching awards for that. I was Air Force Teacher of the Year one year at the Academy and we have a lot of teachers at the Academy.