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I enlisted in the Air Force on February 7<sup>th</sup> of 1966. I got my draft notice around September or October of '65, but before I got drafted I joined the Air Force along with my cousin Phil and his good friend. Phil and I got separated because he had different schooling after Basic Training.

On your eighteenth birthday at that time, you had to go down to Fort Des Moines for a physical checkup to see if you were physically fit to get drafted or join the military. I joined the Air Force because of my cousin's influence. He wanted to join the Air Force. I'd always figured I wanted to go into the Navy, because my favorite uncle was in the Navy. I'm glad I didn't. Aviation was a big factor too, in the Air Force, because I loved aviation. I was nineteen when I went in.

I was excited about going. We flew down to San Antonio and got off the plane at three o'clock in the morning. The military guys who were there waiting for us were just as nice as could be. When we walked off the bus at the base, all hell broke loose. They weren't nice anymore. We belonged to them now. There was a meningitis outbreak at that time, so it was not a true test of Basic Training since we were quarantined a lot. We didn't have to do a lot of obstacle course runs, or other activities because for the first three weeks we were quarantined to the barracks except for going to the chow hall to eat. This was the first time ever we even had TVs in our barracks because there was nothing to do. We had to do all of our physical exercises there, all of our classes were there, sitting on our beds.

I was an Air Force mechanic, engines one and two, which meant any jets with no more than two engines, but some planes had four engines. They had a classification for jet engines mechanics, "over two," which meant four engines in the fighters. I was sent to Minot, North Dakota from June of 1966 to November of 1968. Then I had a tour of duty in Vietnam and Thailand, one year approximately. That was my last assignment because at that time I only had a little over a year of enlistment left. Thailand was a non-war zone at the time but we got planes going over to Vietnam and coming back. We got hit three times in Thailand, right on base. We never had a fatality from it, but we had a couple of injuries, including a sentry dog. They all recovered.

We all turned out when this happened. From where our barracks were and where we had to run to report to our duty stations, was on a flight line. They handed out the M-16s to us. Unfortunately, all the ammunition for them was at the ammo dump for inspection. So all we got was the guns and a bayonet. It was funny even though it was scary at the time. It was mortar fire off the side of the base. It seemed like it was right there, but they were a mile or two away at that time. We just had to stand around in front of our building until the all clear signal sounded. It was about a half a mile or so from our barracks to that. I used to run a half mile in track in high school and I ran that half mile twice as fast. The two times we were hit it was mortar shells flying in again, not a fly-by. It never did any damage to any of our aircraft but some of the ground got damaged. Fortunately, the whole time I was over there, our squadron never lost

a pilot. We lost one ground crewmember.

We had some planes crash. Once a cargo plane came in and we knew it was in trouble. It had taken a lot of battle damage. One of the crew had bailed out but there were still three or four left on board. Only one survived out of that.

This was at Ubon Air Base in Thailand. I worked on the fighter aircraft—the F-4s. I was a crew chief. The crew chief's duty was to get the plane ready for flight, do a walkaround to make sure that nothing was leaking, stuff like that. When the pilots came out—there were always two pilots—we would strap them in, get them ready for flight, help them go through the signals after the engines had started, and then marshal them out on their mission. When they came back, we would bring them back in and refuel the planes, put in the drag chutes—the parachutes that come out the back—and inspect them and make sure there was no metal damage or leaks or anything like that. Get them ready for the flight again. Depended on what the availability of the aircraft was, what the mission was. We were on concrete all the time working and the shoes we had—GI Boots we called them—had good traction on them but wore out fast on concrete. You always had to get a new pair of boots.

When we first got there, we went in for our base and town orientation. They told us, “Okay, you're probably going to go to town, and you gotta buy your own booze to take if you want to take it to town.” They had a liquor store on base. “When you're going by taxi, it's always carry your bottle by the neck.” One guy says, “Well, why?” “Because the Thai law is that if there's an accident, the taxicab would not have been in that spot if you hadn't rented that taxi.” “What's that got to do with holding the booze bottle around the neck?” “Well, you take that and you hit the taxi driver over the head and run like heck.”

When it rained—monsoon season, it rained! There was water running down the concrete that deep. It was still hot, but it was actually cooler most of the time. I say cooler but it was still in the middle eighties. I don't ever recall a day being a hundred. I'm sure the humidity was a heat index of a hundred, hundred and twenty. And on that concrete besides.

When I worked the midnight shift, six PM to six AM, and we had planes going during the night, they always had breakfast during the night and they would bring us C-rations. The external power units

that we had to supply all the electrical stuff to the aircraft were actually small jet engines. They had exhaust coming out of the top. To heat the canned goods in the C-rations, we would take what we called safety wire and wrap it around these cans and hold them over the exhaust. It was like our own microwave. It would take about a minute to heat it up. Then we opened it up with the best can opener in the world, the little GI can opener. These C-rations were from 1942 or 1944, and every one of them had a can opener, a little pack of silverware, and a four-pack of cigarettes. It was either Chesterfields, Lucky Strikes, or Camels. I smoked back then and I think I tried them, but they were dry and rotted—too old. We could sometimes get Sterno over there. I would have Mom or Dad send me Campbell's beans and franks and Slim-Jims.

There was no air conditioning in the barracks. The cubicles had double bunk beds, with two lockers and a little table for the two of us. We had a community refrigerator with a padlock hasp on it. You were allowed to have two or three cases of beer per area. You could only buy so much booze or cigarettes. So we'd get off from being on duty for twelve hours, or whatever the case might be, and if we wanted a cold beer, we had it. But we had to keep it locked because the house boys who did some cleaning and the laundry would get into it and would pass out. The food was better over there than it was when I was in Basic Training. The best of all was the hamburger gravy—SOS we called it. If you wanted eggs over easy, you asked them to be hard.

I didn't get leave while I was at Udon. If I had reenlisted, they were going to fly me to the Philippines and back for a three-day R and R. I'd have to fly over Vietnam to get there.

I got discharged from the Air Force when I came back to California. Because I only had a month and eleven days left service time, they weren't going to ship me to another base. I got home on 23<sup>rd</sup> December and got discharged in Des Moines on Christmas Eve. I was over in Thailand from Christmas Day of '68 until December 23<sup>rd</sup> of '69.

I got a commendation medal for the unit, given whether you were stateside or over there, and a bar for Vietnam. Also the Air Medal for being over there and the rifle range medal. When I left the Air Force, I was a Sergeant. I was scheduled to be promoted to Staff Sergeant on the first of January, but I got discharged on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December which didn't bother me. I was coming home and that's the only

thing I cared about.

In 1974 I wanted to be back with airplanes so I went to Des Moines and joined the Air National Guard. I was in that for ten years. I got to work on airplanes. I quit after that time frame because I just wasn't made to be a supervisor. I decided it would be a good time to quit. Kids, and family, and you

know.

People ask me, "Would you ever go back or would you like to do it over again?" I say, "For a million dollars." I wouldn't trade the experience for a million dollars but I never want to go back again.



**Welcoming a  
Phantom Aircraft  
Back to  
Udon Air Force  
Base**

**The McDonnell-  
Douglas  
F-4  
Phantom**

