

Dwayne Lee Bell - TVHOF Questionnaire

I. Early Childhood & Family Roots

1. What is your full name, date of birth, and place of birth?

Dwayne Lee Bell, Aug 3, 1945, Jacksboro, Texas

2. Where did you grow up, and what was your hometown like during your childhood?

I grew up in Parker County, TX in the countryside between Weatherford and Azle. Azle was a small town founded in 1846 when settlers first came to the area, settling between Ash Creek and Walnut Creek. This was three years before the founding of the city of Fort Worth around the Army Fort on the Trinity River built to protect settlers in the area. One of the early settlers was a pioneer doctor by the name of James Azle Stewart. He donated land for churches and schools, etc. and eventually the town was named after him. In 1940 the population was 800 and by the time I graduated high school it was circa 3,000. It was a peaceful little town with deep roots and descendants of the early settlers were still there. It had become a bedroom community with the majority of the population employed in Fort Worth, especially at the "bomber plant" building the B-58 Hustler under the name General Dynamics. In the surrounding countryside, where we lived, there were cattle and sheep ranches, dairies, and dry land farming of crops.

3. Who were the most influential people in your early life?

My Mother and Father; Pauline and Aaron D. Bell, as well as my Maternal Grandfather Ethan Lee Spangler. He was a farmer and rancher near Post Oak Texas in Jack County that pretty much raised everything that Grandmother served on their table, plus cotton for a cash crop as well as marketing their calves. They had a big garden and in addition to Hereford cattle, they raised chickens, hogs, and were beekeepers.

4. Can you describe your parents or guardians and what they did for a living?

My Mother was well read and could carry on a conversation with anyone. She raised five children while canning most of the vegetables and fruit we ate from our garden and orchard. She was an accomplished seamstress that made a lot of our clothes on her Singer sewing machine powered by a foot-operated treadle. She taught all of her children to read and write plus simple math before we started school. While she was ironing clothes with heavy irons heated on the wood cookstove, I would be sitting at the kitchen table under her tutoring while my three sisters were at school.

My Father was driving a Pug-nose tanker truck for TEXACO, delivering fuel when I was born. Soon after, he went to work at The American Cyanamid plant on the Trinity River downtown Fort Worth in the Riverside District. He worked shifts in maintenance as well as in operations at times. The plant made cracking catalysts for refining fuels. He worked there twenty-seven years, taking early retirement at the age of sixty-two in 1976. When I was about ten years of age the church where we were members (Ash Creek Baptist in Azle) needed a custodian, so he took that on as a second job and continued until sometime after I joined the Navy. Most of the work was accomplished on Saturdays, so I spent my Saturdays assisting and learning good work ethics early in life. By the time my younger brother, Dwyatt, was ten, he was part of that cleaning team as well.

Our Dad also planted a large garden and cared for the orchard with three types of pears, plus apricots and peaches. There was plenty of work in the garden and orchard for boys that were too young to drive and work outside the home. I spent a lot of hours on a ladder picking pears.

5. What values were emphasized in your home growing up?

I grew up in a Christian family with a focus to honor God with our lives. Honesty, integrity, faithfulness, reliability, unquestioned work ethic, respectfulness toward others. These are some of the attributes that were instilled by our parents.

6. Do you recall any early experiences that shaped your sense of duty, service, or patriotism?

My father dropped out of school in 1930 and joined the Army. When he got to El Paso they figured out he had misrepresented his age and was only sixteen, so they sent him home. After he married my Mother he finished High School at a Technical School in Arlington TX studying aircraft maintenance. By the time WWII started he was working at Consolidated Aircraft (Lockheed-Martin today) building the T-6 Texan and B-29 Superfortress, so he was exempt from the draft as he was supporting the war effort.

I had an uncle on my Dad's side, John Henry Poe, that fought in France as a PFC in Co. L 194 Glider Inf during WWII. He is buried in the Post Oak Cemetery near Post Oak Texas, Jack County. He told some stories of his time there when I was young. An uncle on my Mom's side was in the service as a cook, and I think he was in Europe during WWII. He died of lung cancer at the young age of thirty-three.

[John Henry Poe](#)

A Great-Great Grandfather, Edward Brothers fought with Texas Confederates in the Civil War. He is buried in a private cemetery (McFadden) near Gordon, TX.

[Edward 'Ned' Brothers](#)

I didn't have a lot of influence from men who served, but I certainly loved my country (especially Texas) and I had a desire from a very young age for adventure.

7. What are some of your favorite childhood memories?

They would center around my family. Making homemade ice cream in the backyard and before I was old enough to turn the crank I would take turns with my brother sitting on top of the freezer to hold it down while Dad turned it. When our weight would not hold it down it was time to pack it and let it sit for a while before we opened it.

Bringing a long watermelon in from the garden early and letting it sit in a tub of cold water pumped from the well. Eventually we had an electric fridge for that. We would gather in the backyard and split it end to end. The men got one half and the ladies the other half and we sat around our halves with spoons. Our dog would get his portion from the men's half.

My middle sister (Willie Fern) loved to play softball so she would instigate a family game of scrub.

Offentimes during the hot summers, we would break down the metal frame beds we slept on and move them out under the stars in the backyard.

Family mealtimes together: Mom was an awesome cook and up until I was eight, she cooked on a wood stove. We ALWAYS had breakfast and Supper together and there was always plenty to eat, plus dessert, after supper. If it was fried chicken, Mother would ring their neck, pluck, clean, cut them up, and then

cook on the wood stove. Cleaning up after supper was a family affair with everyone pitching in. Perhaps we would let Mom sit that part out. As my sisters got older they were involved with the cooking too, especially the youngest one, Gloria. She loved cooking and continued that in life for her clan and large church groups as well.

After we got the electric stove we ate a lot of pot roast on Sundays. Mother would put them on the stove early morning and when we came home from church the meal was ready.

In addition to those memories: riding horses, bringing hay in from the field and stacking it in the loft of the big red barn, quail hunting in the pastures behind the house. Dad also kept beehives and processed the honey when I was young. We had mustang grapes growing wild on the fencelines, so our pantry was stocked with grape jelly and jam.

In Jack County on my grandfather Ethan Spangler's ranch, there would be castrating and dehorning calves in the split rail pens built by Granddad. I was too young to be much help but thought I was helping. In late spring the beehives were robbed and there would be honeycomb slices handed to the kids with honey dripping out of them. In the fall it would be harvesting a hog, boiling water and scraping before carving it up and hanging it in the old granary for dry curing, or in the big wooden box for salt curing. Best bacon I ever had!

II. Education & High School Years

1. Where did you attend high school?

Azle High School, Azle Texas

2. What years did you attend?

1st–12th grade, 1951–1963

3. Were there teachers, coaches, or mentors who had a strong impact on you?

My Vocational Agriculture Teacher H.C. Walkup

4. Did you participate in sports, clubs, music, ROTC, or other activities?

I played Little League Baseball as a catcher and/or pitcher until I was thirteen. After that I wanted to work during the summer as much as possible. I worked for a man that did custom hay baling, cutting and raking hay as well as hauling and stacking in the barns.

During the school year I chose to work after school and weekends over sports. Jobs included sacking groceries or at service stations, pumping gas, fixing flats, changing oil or fan belts, etc.

I did participate in FFA in raising sheep and competing in livestock shows including the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show. In the FFA we also competed in livestock and grass judging with other schools, in various shows including the Houston Livestock Show.

5. How would you describe yourself as a student?

I started off in grade school as a straight A student. By the time I reached my sophomore year in high school you could say I was bored and just doing what I needed to do to get it behind me. The only course

I was enjoying was Ag, especially the shop part where we learned how to weld and other practical things that I enjoyed. From a very early age I took an interest in “how things work” and would take them apart and put them back together.

6. What events in high school do you remember most clearly?

The things mentioned above.

7. At what point did you begin thinking about military service?

After graduation in May 1963, I had started working for The Rexall Drug Company on the 6th floor of a large warehouse on Lancaster Ave. on the south end of downtown Fort Worth. We shipped case goods to their stores all over the western half of the States. It was just a job. I was just marking time trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I was there on November 22, 1963, when Kennedy held a rally outside the Texas Hotel just a few blocks away and then later that morning was assassinated while driving through Dealey Plaza in Dallas.

In early 1964 a friend, James Harrington, who had graduated a couple of years ahead of me, came home on leave from the Navy. We met up again and he was telling me how he was on an Aircraft Carrier working on fighter jets and traveling the world. That intrigued me and the more I thought about that after he left, I decided that I would enlist in the Navy.

I recall a quote by Kennedy, “Ask not what your country can do for you --- ask what you can do for your country.” Perhaps that had a little influence in the decision to enlist in the Navy.

After making that decision I came in from work and told my Mom as she was preparing supper. I had expected she might try to change my mind, but she didn’t. She knew before I did that I was wasting my time and needed to make a change. She just gave me a hug!

I talked to a recruiter at the Navy recruiting center a few blocks from Dealey Plaza in Dallas. I signed some papers and they set a date of March 2, 1964, to come back and take the oath. I departed from Love Field along with 20-something other recruits from the DFW area. We flew out to San Diego, arriving after dark. I was in jeans and a short-sleeve shirt. It was warm back in Texas, but the sea breeze blowing in off the Pacific was cold.

8. Was military service common in your family at that time?

No

III. Decision to Serve

1. What influenced your decision to join the military?

Answered above.

2. Did anyone encourage or discourage your decision?

Answered above.

3. How old were you when you enlisted?

I was 18 years old.

4. Where did you enlist or accept your commission?

Answered above.

5. What were your thoughts and emotions as you prepared to leave for training?

I was ready for a change, filled with eager anticipation.

IV. Military Training & Early Service

1. What branch of service did you serve in?

Naval Aviation

2. What years did you serve?

March 2, 1964 – August 3, 1968

3. Where did you attend basic training and advanced training?

Basic training was in San Diego, CA. Advanced training was at the Naval Air Station in Millington, TN, where I completed Basic Mechanical Fundamentals, finishing #29 of 168; Jet Engine Maintenance & Overhaul, finishing #2 of 46; and Helicopter Theory of Flight, Maintenance & Overhaul, finishing #1 of 15 in the class. I was no longer bored. I had found my calling.

4. What was your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) or job?

ADJ2 Aviation Machinist Mate 2nd Class (E5)

5. What do you remember most about your early days in uniform?

Boot camp was not anything to dread like I had anticipated. After the first week of getting gear issued, all the vaccinations and completing a battery of tests, it settled down to learning how the Navy works and the various seaman classes required to make a shipboard sailor out of us no matter what your MOS.

6. Who were some of your early leaders or mentors?

Names escape me after all these years, but once I reached my first duty station in Norfolk, VA, there were Navy Chiefs and Division Officers who mentored and encouraged me. I was maintaining SH-3 A&D model helicopters in Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron 3, "HS-3 Tridents."

7. How did military life differ from what you expected?

I didn't have any preconceived ideas, but I was enjoying it.

V. Deployments, Combat, and Mission Accomplishments

1. Were you deployed overseas? If so, where and when?

When I joined HS-3 Anti-Submarine Squadron attached to CVS-11 Intrepid, the Intrepid was undergoing overhaul in a New York shipyard. Therefore, we would send small detachments to sea for sea trials with other squadrons on other carriers, chasing subs. I volunteered every time there was an opportunity.

Eventually, when the Intrepid came out of the yards, the decision was made in the Pentagon to revert it back to a CVA (attack) and send it to Vietnam. It had to complete a "shake-down" cruise before deployment, so we took four helicopters on board to "fly angel" while flight operations were being conducted. During launch and recovery, we would have two helicopters in orbit, so one was always headed toward the carrier in case a pilot went into the water.

While in HS-3 in addition to maintenance, I earned my air crew wings by flying missions as a sonar operator. I would work an eight-hour day in my MOS and then fly a four-hour night mission as a sonar operator. When we didn't have a ship to operate from, we still had training with submarines off the coast of Virginia to keep our skills honed.

I advanced in rank to E5 while in HS-3 and was a quality inspector for the Powertrain Division. At the age of twenty-one, I became the supervisor of the Engine Build-up Shop on the T58-10s that powered the SH-3D.

In 1966, as Vietnam continued to heat up, the Navy decided they needed helicopter gunships to support the "Brown Water Navy" operating in the Mekong Delta to stop the flow of arms and troops coming down through Laos and Cambodia into Southern Vietnam. Initially the US Army provided some support, but by early 1967 the Navy was pulling men from helicopter squadrons to form a dedicated combat squadron of Navy personnel. When they came to HS-3, I was not one of the ten chosen because I didn't have enough time left on my enlistment to go through the training and give them a year in Vietnam. One man selected was a married career man with 14 years of service of the same MOS and rank who was not too keen on going. Our Maintenance Officer was a very senior W4 Warrant Officer with over 30 years of service and many friends in the Pentagon. With the help of his friends, he arranged for me to receive orders to join HA(L)-3, so I extended my enlistment six months to make it happen.

We went through weapons training with Navy SEALs as instructors at the Little Creek Amphibious Base in Norfolk, followed by escape and evasion training on the approximately 76,000-acre Fort A.P. Hill Army Training Center. We also went to Fort Eustis, VA, for maintenance training on the UH-1 Hueys and to Fort Benning, Georgia, for door gunner training.

After a short leave at home, I arrived in Vietnam on July 28, 1967. Following a short indoctrination at Squadron Headquarters in Vung Tau for HA(L)-3, Seawolves, I joined Det 1, a two-helicopter detachment on the Garrett County (LST-542), anchored in the Bassac River downstream from Can Tho. There were also ten PBRs (River Patrol Boats) attached and tied up alongside the LST. According to my flight logs, I flew my first combat mission as a door gunner on August 3, my 22nd birthday. By September 3, only one month later, I had earned my first Air Medal and reached my second Air Medal by September 9. We were active, to say the least.

On September 1, we experienced the loss of a helicopter, and two of the crew did not survive. It was a nighttime scramble to support a Vietnamese outpost that was under attack with the threat of being overrun. LCDR Robert Johnson was the pilot, and LT Al Bacankus was the co-pilot. Edward Ott was the crew chief and left-side door gunner, and the name of the other door gunner escapes me. They lifted off

the deck on an overcast night, flew only a short distance from the ship, and hit the water. Al Bacankus survived and told us that when they hit the water the windshield and front of the helicopter just opened up and he swam out. He reported hearing what he thought was someone in the vicinity struggling to swim but could not see them. PBR sailors quickly rescued Al and the right-side door gunner, who also survived, albeit with injuries including a deep laceration across his face. He was medevaced to a hospital in Vung Tau, and I believe from there he returned to the States. That night I stood on deck looking across the water, thinking that could have been me they were looking for. When I returned home a year later and told my family about that experience, my oldest sister, Carolyn June, immediately told me that on a night in September 1967 she awoke from a dream where I was in water calling out to her for help.

A search for the two missing was initiated and we flew the banks of the river and several miles out of the mouth of the river into the South China Sea for the better part of two days, to no avail. Navy Seals located the wreckage at the bottom of the river, but no bodies were found. That is extremely hard for the families that never had closure to this day.

[LCDR Robert Dennison "Bob" Johnson](#)

[Bio. Edward L. Ott III](#)

LT Al Bacankus transferred to Det 7 sometime before the end of the year and with his assistance, on Jan 1st, 1968, I followed him, leaving Det 1, transferring to Det 7 located in a small compound on the banks for the Bassac, upriver from Can Tho, near the small village of Binh Thuy. There we also had two UH-1B Helicopters, 10 PBR's and a Team of Seals from Little Creek, VA, home of Seal Team 2, plus "ships company" to operate the compound. The Seal Team was led by Richard Marchinco who some years later formed Seal Team 6. During the Tet offensive he had his team up on the Cambodian border in Chau Doc for a period of time. We went up at his request and flew him on a RECON mission. He was sitting on the floor in front of me in gym shorts and T-shirt, with his bare feet dangling out the door. He was an interesting character to say the least.

Basic armament for our helicopters was 14 × 2.75-inch rockets (7 each side) with 10-pound warheads most of the time. There were also 17-pound warheads available, but we were already over gross weight, so we rarely loaded the 17-pounders. Rockets were normally fired by the pilot. There were four pylon-mounted, flexible M60 machine guns controlled by the co-pilot, with 1,000 rounds each fed from underneath the door gunner seats in the rear of the cabin. Each door gunner carried a free-held M60 machine gun with a modified butt and typically 2,000 rounds in a box or ammo can between his legs. If a pylon-mounted M60 jammed, the ammo for that gun could be used when a door gunner ran out of ammo. That happened often. Door gunners wore belts with a long tail secured to the aft wall in the cabin that gave us the freedom to stand outside with one foot on the rocket pod and brace the other leg on a litter pole in the doorway. This allowed us to shoot forward coming in on a target, pivot around staying on target as we passed over, then shoot back under the tail boom as we pulled up and away from the target.

On one rather short daytime mission where we had been "scrambled" to support PBRs under fire; when we returned and landed I looked down to release my gunner's belt and realized I had failed to strap it on during the rush. That was sobering and I was very careful to ensure that it never happened again!

We also carried the Navy-issued Colt .45 caliber pistol on our hip. We kept M16s hanging on the back of the pilot's and co-pilot's seats within reach, and an M79 grenade launcher with a box of 40mm grenades with flechettes, small steel darts (also called Beehive rounds). We also kept two or three serviceable M60 barrels lying on the floor in front of us on welding gloves. Our barrels would glow white hot at times and the gun would slow down as a result, so we would change barrels while circling for the next run. We also had at least three M60 operating rods with a bolt attached hanging on a wire stretched across the wall behind us. The connection between the operating rod and bolt was subject to break with the number of

rounds we were putting through the M60, and we became very proficient at changing those out between runs, day or night, and staying in the game.

2. Can you describe a significant mission, operation, or combat experience?

There were many such missions. In my 11½ months of combat flying, I flew 461 missions during 600+ hours of flight time. There were acts of courage, leadership, or sacrifice daily, some days more so than others, but I was there during the 1968 Tet Offensive, hailed as the bloodiest period of the entire Vietnam War. From the beginning of that offensive on the lunar New Year on the evening of January 31 through June, it was intense and challenging.

Over the course of my year in country, I earned 40 Air Medals based on the point system as a result of the 461 missions. During the period just mentioned, I was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross on May 8 and a Navy Commendation with Combat "V" for Valor on April 7, 1968. On that mission our pilot, Big Jim Walker (buried in Pensacola), took us into point-blank range on the enemy that had a PBR pinned down. The expended brass from our six M60s rained down on the PBR crew as we came over so low. Hot brass down your collar burns, I know first-hand. But none of them complained about that when we all got back to our base.

I also received another Air Medal for an action in a single mission on June 20th. On that mission we were putting in strikes on the enemy that had Vietnamese forces penned down on Cu Lao Mai Island. We were asked to medivac two seriously wounded RVN soldiers. When we landed in a tight area in the thick of the battle, I jumped out and ran to meet them, helping carry the wounded to our gunship, not equipped for medevac BTW. I was just trying to expedite the recovery before our helicopter was disabled by enemy fire.

Other memorable missions would include a late-night call during the early days of the Tet Offensive to medivac a village chief from a small village a few miles off the Bassac River. When we arrived, the village was engulfed in fire. Two or three cars were parked around a soccer pitch to illuminate our LZ. When we got on the ground, they were bringing someone to us using a door for a gurney. There was also a man being aided along, holding his guts wrapped in a sheet, with a woman and a small girl following. I had to set my ammo can out on the ground to get the door to slide in on the floor. We loaded the other passengers between the other gunner and myself, with the little girl clinging tightly to my right arm.

As we lifted off and turned to depart, wind flowing through the cabin made it obvious the man on the door had been deceased for some time. We flew into a Vietnamese Military Hospital in Can Tho and had not been able to raise anyone on the radio to let them know we were inbound. So the other gunner and I took the body on the door and rolled it off on a bench near the hospital. He was stiff enough that the door really wasn't necessary. We then used the door to carry the man holding his intestines in a sheet. By the time we reached the hospital with him, some medics came out and took him. I patted one on the shoulder and pointed to the body on the bench. That memory is embedded.

Others would include some of the several times we encountered heavy fire from two islands in the river a short distance from our base of operation; Cu Lao Tan Dinh, and Cu Lao Mai.

The Viet Cong operated primarily at night, so the bulk of our missions were flown at night. We often took fire from Tan Dinh, but one night it was extremely heavy and included .50 caliber fire. The tracers coming up from the .50 caliber looked like glowing tennis balls. Support was called in for a pair of A-4 Skyhawks out of Saigon, and one was shot down. His wingman called for an Air Force Kaman Husky H-43 (their call sign was Pedro) to pick up the downed pilot. Eventually the enemy fire was suppressed, and we went home calling it a night. I don't know if we defeated them or they just ran out of ammo.

The SEALs also operated a lot at night, going in after midnight to assassinate someone, for example. Sometimes they would manage to complete their mission and extract without being detected. That was the goal. However, one morning at first light the whispering call came in asking for our assistance. When we were on duty, we slept in our uniforms with boots on in a trailer house a few feet from the helicopters that were also ready to go. When a call came, we could be airborne in two minutes. As we approached the island, the SEAL with the radio explained they were extracting but had been discovered. Vegetation on the island was dense, so we could not pinpoint the location of the SEALs nor the enemy. We were asked to fly over the area as a fear factor and distraction while they made it back to their flat-bottom modified Boston Whaler.

That worked for a couple of passes at treetop level, but they figured out what we were doing. On the third pass a Viet Cong with an AK-47 almost emptied his clip on us as we flew right over him, never seeing him. We looked around at each other as the pilot pulled up and began to circle. No one had been injured, but the fuel gauge was dropping. I leaned out and looked behind and saw a fog of jet fuel spilling out behind us and reported that to the pilot.

We were able to fly across to the mainland and land in a field clearing. We disembarked, taking weapons and ammo, and set up a perimeter around our downed helicopter. The wing ship initially flew around above to defend. Soon a company of RVN troops arrived from a small outpost upriver with a Green Beret advisor to add to our defense. That allowed the wing ship to drop off their gunners back at home base and return to pick up our pilots. The other gunner and I stayed with our helicopter until an Army CH-47 arrived to lift it out. Examination of the helicopter revealed we were hit with sixteen rounds from the AK-47. The one that brought us down took out the fuel crossover valve between the main tanks. One round came up under my seat, but we had cut pieces of boilerplate and tied them under the gunner seats on our helicopters. That made my day!

When the SEALs were conducting daytime operations, we would sometimes position ourselves closer to the operation, like landing on a soccer pitch in a small village, with enough distance to not reveal the location of the operation. This would draw every kid in the village. I have vivid memories of one young girl about ten or eleven years of age with smallpox scars covering her face and haunting eyes, standing close by and staring at us.

One such daytime operation was Operation Bold Dragon III on March 26 on Tan Dinh Island, with SEALs and RVN troops inserted, plus PBRs and Seawolves assisting. The mission destroyed an enemy bunker complex on the island. Reviewing my Navy flight logs for March 26, I flew three missions that day with 2.9 hours total flight time.

Finally, I would say the mission on May 8 stands out in memory. RVN forces were up against a battalion-size force of enemy fighters not far from our base. The Army only had two Bell AH-1G Cobras supporting the RVN. The Cobra carried a lot more armament and was very effective, but it took more time to rearm when they ran out. They needed a second team to keep the pressure on the enemy. Therefore, they called us asking for help while they rearmed. We never turned down a request for assistance, so we were soon on station.

During a low-level run on the enemy, the lead ship under heavy enemy fire was taking hits. One round got Lloyd Cone, the right-hand side gunner. As he went forward, still gripping the trigger, his M60 caused considerable damage to the structure of the aircraft right behind the pilot, with shrapnel injuring the pilot's legs. We were coming in behind them and saw their aircraft go into an unusual attitude, indicating they had been hit. The co-pilot in the lead ship told us Lloyd had been hit as he took control of the aircraft.

We continued our run on the enemy with a determination to inflict as much pain as possible while the lead ship broke right, pulling off and heading to the nearest hospital for Lloyd. When our run was

complete, we followed to the hospital at the RVN Air Force base near Binh Thuy. Lloyd was rushed into the hospital but soon passed into eternity. He had just celebrated his 20th birthday a few weeks before.

[Lloyd Cone THE WALL OF FACES - Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund](#)

While he was rushed to the hospital, I started pulling panels and checking flight control systems to see if we could safely fly the lead ship back to our base. I determined it was safe to do so.

Later that evening, our Det Commander, CDR Martin, and I flew the damaged helicopter to Vinh Long, where HA(L)-3 had a detachment with a fire team plus a small maintenance detachment on the Army base there. The maintenance team was led by a W4 warrant officer. CDR Martin asked to swap for a serviceable helicopter, and the W4 said he had one he could let us take, but only after the Commander would entertain a group of young orphan girls he was housing on the base. A Catholic orphanage in Vinh Long that he had been assisting and ministering to was under threat of being overrun. Indeed, Douglas A-1 Skyraiders, aka Spads, were dropping bombs not far outside the perimeter of the base where we landed.

Little did I know that CDR Martin came from a family of performers. He put on a magic show that impressed me, using me as his prop. The kids and nuns loved the show, and it brought a bit of joy into their stressful situation (and mine too).

We got our replacement Huey and flew home in the dark at an altitude where we wouldn't draw any fire. It was a sad day but an interesting day with indelible memories. We mourned the loss of Lloyd for several days but got on with our jobs. It brought all of us closer together.

3. How did you and your unit prepare for the challenges

We had very basic training, but no training could have fully prepared us for some of the situations we found ourselves in. I would say we had some very good people working together as a close-knit team, improvising where necessary and determined to get the job done and go home whole. We didn't manage 100% of that. Over the period the Seawolves operated in Vietnam, officially established in April 1967 through March 1972, 44 Seawolves paid the ultimate price. I knew five of them personally and flew with them. The squadron was honored in the 111th Congress Session with House Resolution 122B.

In addition to the three KIA mentioned before, these links are for the other two that I knew personally who paid the ultimate price.

[Dennis Wobee THE WALL OF FACES - Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund](#)

[Christopher Maher THE WALL OF FACES - Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund](#)

4. How did these experiences change you as a person?

The Navy certainly matured me. I went from an 18-year-old kid wasting his time running on a rocky path on the rim of the canyon to a more settled young man with a plan and confidence in himself. It launched me into a career in aviation that took me to over sixty countries throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa and gave me a lifetime of memories. Recently, as Cindy and I were approaching our 56th wedding anniversary, I asked her what drew her to me. She responded with something about me being mature and sure of myself, self-confident. Based on that, if she had met me before I joined the Navy, she probably would not have given me a second look, LOL.

VI. Brotherhood, Leadership & Military Life

1. How would you describe the camaraderie among those you served with?

Especially during my time in Vietnam, we were family; officers and men. Our detachment was one family of one mind. I don't recall any strife between members of our detachment. Just a mutual respect for each other, looking out for each other.

2. Are there fellow service members you still think about often?

Yes, especially the men I served with in Vietnam.

3. What leadership lessons did you learn during your service?

Number one would be to lead by example. To lead, you have to be out in front and encouraging those you lead.

4. Did you ever hold a leadership position? If so, how did it shape you?

From May 8 until the end of my tour, I was the Leading Petty Officer of Det 7. As such, I was in charge of the flight and ground support crews. By that time, the replacements that were arriving had only completed boot camp and their MOS schooling. This was their first duty station. They were young and unbelievably eager and fast learners. Pretty amazing when I think back on it. What a pleasure to lead guys like that and invest your experience in them.

After I returned to the USA and separated from active duty, I was soon back in Vietnam as a contractor (more on that later). I was based in Can Tho and rode my little Honda up to visit with them, and it was like a family reunion. They were excited and wanted to share their latest exploits with me.

VII. Family During Military Service

1. Were you married or in a relationship during your service?

Single

2. How did your service affect your family?

Until I went to Vietnam, my service was not a burden to my family. However, the last year in Vietnam was hard on all of them and they were praying for me, especially my Mom. She aged a lot that year.

3. How did you stay connected with loved ones while deployed?

I wrote letters regularly without sharing too many details of my experiences. I also sent a lot of photos and 35mm slides with a list explaining the photos and slides. By the time I came home, Mom had shown the slides to friends and family so many times she could do the presentation without looking at my notes. LOL.

You know it takes months for awards to be processed before presentation. By the time the DFC went through that process, I was back in Vietnam as a contractor. Mom received a call near the end of November 1968 from the local Navy office in Dallas or Fort Worth, I'm not sure. They wanted to come out and present it to me personally. Mom told them I was in Vietnam. The reply was, "No, he came home and this is the contact info we have for him." When she explained why I was back in Vietnam, they came out and presented it to her. When that and the other awards came in the mail, she understood why I had gone a bit silent during those last months when she was not getting as much mail from me.

4. Are there letters, photos, or keepsakes that hold special meaning?

I think I still have the letters that I sent home because she kept them.

5. What sacrifices did your family make during your military career?

Well, I made it home, so the sacrifice was the stress and concern over whether they would be able to embrace me again. Later you will see I went back after I married Cindy. The sacrifice for her, with a new baby daughter, was much greater.

VIII. Transition from Military Service

1. When and why did you leave the military?

I was ready for something different and was separated from active duty at the Naval Base on Treasure Island at that time. I believe I arrived there around August 1, 1968, and was separated on my 23rd birthday, August 3. I also think it would have been hard to go back to the "regimented regular Navy" after the experience of serving with the Seawolves.

2. How did you feel about transitioning back to civilian life?

I bought a '63 Vette convertible. Two of my siblings were still living at home, Dwyatt and Willie Fern. We partnered on a ski boat and spent a lot of time on Eagle Mountain Lake over the next three weeks.

After that relaxing time, I started sending out résumés to companies that contracted in Vietnam, i.e., Air America, Dynalectron Corporation, and Lear Siegler. I did not possess an FAA A&P license at the time. Mr. Dawson of the CIA was the first to respond and told me to get the A&P and he would have a job for me with Air America. I wanted to go to Spartan School of Aeronautics and get the A&P, but I wanted to bankroll a little more funds before doing that.

Lear Siegler was the first to come back with an offer, so on October 7, 1968, I flew out to San Francisco. The next day I picked up a U.S. passport and flew out of Travis Air Force Base on a contract flight with troops headed to Vietnam. I was sent to Can Tho, doing contract maintenance on Army helicopters, UH-1s and CH-47s. The pay was good, and I rented an apartment over a gold shop in Can Tho.

After seven months of that, I resigned and repatriated. With a brief stay at home again, I departed in my Vette with everything I owned at the time, which was a toolbox, an Akai X-1800SD tape recorder, and a couple of changes of clothes. I had learned that if you drove a used Vette, you needed a toolbox behind the seat.

3. What challenges did you face during that transition?

I don't recall having any major challenges. To say the Vietnam War was unpopular would be an understatement. I didn't talk about my experiences with anyone but my family, or occasionally, if someone asked, I might share a little.

4. What skills from the military helped you most afterward?

My training and experience in aircraft maintenance gained in the Navy was the foundation of my career in that field.

5. Looking back, what support would have helped you during this time?

Looking back, the GI Bill helped me get my FAA A&P license and an FAA Commercial Pilot rating. I couldn't ask for more.

IX. Post-Military Career & Community Involvement

1. What career or work did you pursue after military service?

After completing my studies at Spartan School of Aeronautics in January 1970, a few weeks later I landed a job with Bell Helicopter in Fort Worth as a Field Service Rep (today the title is Field Engineer). That became a thirty-seven-year adventure taking me to sixty-something countries on four continents, establishing foreign residencies in Iran, Germany, and Italy for a combined total of 37-plus years.

After several months of training on all Bell models at their world-class Training Academy, my first duty assignment was back to Vietnam as a Field Service Rep for the OH-58A Scout, which was new in the U.S. Army inventory. My office was in Can Tho. The bulk of the OH-58As were located in that area, with a few more in Vinh Long and Vung Tau. I would "hitchhike" on helicopters and fixed-wings to the other locations.

We didn't qualify as residents working on a U.S. government contract, so in order to qualify for IRS tax exemption we had to have 510 days out of an eighteen-month period outside of the USA. That meant that at the end of one year the company would fly you home for a short break, circa 29 days, and return you for at least six more months. More later about marriage and family, but when I went back to Vietnam I was married with a daughter, Amy Dawn, born a few weeks before I departed. This time the stress of separation from family was tremendous. About midway through the year, I had Cindy fly to Bangkok, Thailand, and met her there for a short vacation. That was the honeymoon we didn't manage to take when we married. She left Amy behind with my mom and dad in Azle, so her heart was only half in Bangkok and Pattaya Beach.

When I eventually finished my Vietnam tour for Bell, my assignment was Glenview Naval Air Station in the suburbs of Chicago. I was there for circa three years on a contract with a Marine Air Training Detachment maintaining UH-1Es for a Reserve Squadron.

From there I was assigned to Pensacola, FL, where Navy pilots are trained. They were using Bell Commercial 206Bs for basic helicopter training and the Bell UH-1 for advanced training.

There I reconnected with a few career sailors that I had served with in HS-3 and HA(L) 3. That was a short-lived assignment. In the summer of 1976, I got a call to pack up and come back to Fort Worth. They needed me in Iran.

In 1972, Bell Demo had a team go to Tehran that resulted in the Shah making a major purchase of over four hundred helicopters split between the Bell 214B and AH-1J Twin Cobra. Sales of military hardware go through the U.S. government. After the sale, the U.S. government left the training and support with Bell Helicopter. As a result, a new company, Bell International, was formed, and eventually there were some five thousand employees, many with families, in that new company. The bulk of the employees were mechanics, maintaining these new aircraft, with four or five Iranian counterparts working with them and getting on-the-job training in the process.

There were ten of us Field Service Reps from the parent company as advisors to the Bell Intl. maintenance units as a link to our engineering department in Fort Worth to solve technical problems. I was based in Kermanshah in the western part about halfway between Tehran and Baghdad, Iraq.

Initially I went solo before bringing Cindy and Amy over. During the first month, I rented a house and got it fully furnished and the pantry stocked before bringing Cindy and Amy over at the end of September. I had about three and a half years' combined experience, both in the military and as a contractor in Vietnam, so moving into Iran was just another adventure for me. However, it was a big culture shock for Cindy and Amy. I was trying to ease that shock. Driving in Kermanshah (any city in Iran) was like trying to get out of the parking lot at quitting time at a giant aerospace company. It was dog-eat-dog, so Cindy didn't drive for the first several months.

Bell International didn't have schooling for their families in Kermanshah, so families with children were not assigned there. Before we left Pensacola, we had visited Pensacola Christian Academy and got set up for Cindy to homeschool Amy using their curriculum. We set up a bedroom as a classroom, and class started every morning at eight. Teaching could be completed by noon, and Amy would then have a couple of hours of "seat work" to complete. In order for it to be accredited, all the work had to be mailed back to Pensacola every three weeks, and a teacher there would respond with comments.

It didn't take long to settle in and start to enjoy life there. Amy picked up considerable Farsi playing with the neighbor kids. I took a short course in Farsi at the local adult continuing education that got me started. We bought horses and had them stabled up near the mountains on the north side of town. We bought a Stud and a Mare, let them breed and got a beautiful colt out of the deal. Amy turned it into a pet.

We were surprised at the biblical history in Iran. For example, the tomb of Daniel, a Jew in the Bible, is located in Susa in the southwestern part of Iran. The tomb of Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai, Jews from the Book of Esther in the Old Testament, is located in modern-day Hamadan between Kermanshah and Tehran. We traveled to both of those on more than one occasion. Moving to Iran was actually a spiritual awakening for me.

There happened to be a small contingency of missionaries in Kermanshah with International Missions. Three American families with children plus an older couple from New Zealand without children with them. They had been having their personal worship service in their homes but after the arrival of the Americans there were enough of us that the Armenian Presbyterian congregation in Kermanshah let us rent their sanctuary for a service on Fridays, the holy day in Islam and therefore the day off for Bell Intl. employees.

Trouble started to brew in 1978 against the autocratic rule of the Shah. He was a staunch ally of the USA but seen as a US Puppet by the religious conservative, and they were against his moves toward "westernization". His human rights abuses included a secret police (The SAVAK similar to the Nazis) they were known for imprisonment, torture and execution of political dissidents. The unrest became like a

snowball rolling down the hill. We kept thinking the Shah would come down hard and stop the descent, but it always seemed his actions were about 30 days too late to change the situation.

In Aug 1978, having agreed to stay another year, we had earned a 30-day trip back home in Texas. That included a little sight-seeing with stops going and coming back. By the time we were back in country the situation was deteriorating to the point where I was beginning to feel the pressure and uneasiness for the safety of my family.

By November, we were told the contracts for the two of us Bell Reps in Kermanshah would end on 31 Dec.

As part of the protest, gas stations would close down creating fuel shortages, and the power grid would be shut off over the whole city for a few hours each night. Anything to disrupt normal day to day activities was fair game.

On November 18, while the power was out, our house was firebombed with two crude Molotov cocktails thrown over the wall around the courtyard in front. Fortunately, there was no damage. We had a lot of marble in the courtyard. One landed on the marble and flared up but didn't cause damage to the house. The other landed on top of the flat asphalt roof and did not break. The event got our attention in any case. After that, when the power would go off, I stood guard each night at the front gate. I didn't have a weapon. All I had was a club the size of a baseball bat made from what I had cut off of a Christmas tree the year before, plus a knife for filleting fish.

By the beginning of December, we started downsizing. We didn't sell the horses, we just left them at the stable where we kept them, hoping the owner of the stables would keep them and treat them humanely. Many of the Iranians were abusive to their horses, but the owner of the stables was not. He was very wealthy and owned a ranch in the state of Montana as well.

Our neighbor was a Colonel that commanded a Tank Battalion. When I told him we would be leaving at the end of the year, he immediately said he had lots of family members that would buy all of our furniture. He told me to put a price on things we wanted to sell. He would have them pay 50% immediately and the balance when we were leaving. What a friend! Knowing I would be selling out eventually, I had kept a ledger on everything I had purchased to furnish the house, itemized by the room. I marked everything to sell at 80% of cost and we had an open house for his family members. Within a few hours they had given me the downpayment and everything we didn't want to keep was sold. Just before Christmas I told him they could take the household goods. They came and cleaned us out paying the balance as promised. We could not have asked for more.

I bought a 1962 Willys Wagoner in 1977 as a project to restore in my spare time. That was an interesting and fun project to undertake, and I learned a good bit more Farsi in the process. It was the last thing I sold as we were leaving.

We celebrated Christmas in an empty house except for our luggage and departed in a chartered minibus on Christmas Eve with cans of diesel fuel down the center aisle so we could make the three hundred plus mile journey to Tehran and not depend on finding diesel on the way. There was considerable snow on the road especially going over the 6,000-foot pass at Hamadan, so there was a little slipping and sliding on the way. The Shah had declared martial law in several cities that shut them down from sunset to sunrise. We came to one of those about an hour outside Tehran and sat on the side of the road until daylight. When we rolled into Tehran on Christmas morning the city looked like a war zone with buses and cars smoldering in the streets. As we weaved through the rubble I told the driver to take us up on the North side of the City to a new Hilton Hotel near the mountains knowing it would be a bit removed from the rioting and turmoil. We checked in and then I took a taxi back into the center of town to the street with all the airline offices thinking I would get tickets to some destination outside of Iran. Only a few were open

but had the steel rolling shutter that is typical in the middle east, pulled down to about waist level. They would roll it up and let me in but to no avail. I tried every shop that would let me in, but none could issue a ticket as they were not flying. Ground workers at the airport were on strike so airlines could not get the service required to fly out. The next two mornings I did the same thing, sometimes facing a mob walking down the street the other way. I didn't make eye contact, just kept walking and ducking in the first shop I could get in. On the 27th, when I came back to the Hotel in the evening I met a man from Belgium in the lobby and started a conversation. He had arrived that day from Aman Jorden, a short flight that did not need service to return. He was planning to leave the hotel at 0530 the next morning and the airline had promised to call if they had to cancel.

The next morning, we were in the lobby with all our luggage, and he had not received a call and was headed to the Airport. Therefore, I got a taxi and loaded up. The price has by now has gone up about tenfold, but I agreed and we are on the way, praying as we go. When we arrived, it was again a scene of chaos. There was a long line of people queued up just to get through the chain-link fence into the terminal. As we got closer to the gate, I saw guards with rifles were granting access ONLY to those that have a ticket.

This took a little quick thinking. Going back to April 1978. We had gifted my parents an "around the world trip" on Pan American flight 2. They left Dallas headed west making a few overnight stops on the way, arriving in Tehran. They stayed three weeks in Iran and then we all went to Israel for a week. Thereafter they continued to Paris for one night. Their tickets included a side trip to Frankfurt and back to Paris and then continued to New York and Dallas. They were tired and decided to forgo the side trip and just head on home. After they got home Dad mailed the tickets for the side trip back to me. They were rather useless to me, but I put them in my briefcase. However, God had a purpose for those tickets. I reached in my briefcase and flashed the tickets, and we were allowed to pass the check point.

Once inside the terminal, the first thing I noted was a young lady at a Swiss Air counter with nobody in line. I went up and asked if they were flying and the answer was "yes." Next question, "Do you have three seats available?" The answer was "yes"! I then said, "I will take three please." and gave her our passports, As she was making out the tickets she paused and said, "We will be flying to Geneva today." I replied, "That will be fine." Switzerland being a neutral peace-loving country was able to get service for a turn around. We boarded but I did not relax until I heard the gear bump as they retracted into the wheel wells and then thanked God for an answer to our prayers.

When we got to a Hotel in Geneva, I called my Dad and he cried. They were watching the news and anxiously waiting for word from us knowing we were struggling to get out.

I forgot to mention, before I sold the Jeep Wagoneer, I had a 55-gal drum in back that I had stored up fuel in when I could find fuel, and my back-up plan was to drive out into Turkey if I had to and leave the Jeep there. I had told my Dad about that plan in a phone call a few days earlier'. Dad passed on the news to Cindy's family.

We decided to relax a little and see a bit more of Europe, so I called my supervisor in Fort Worth to let him know we had escaped and didn't get skinned up in the process. Also told him we would take a little time off and come in after the New Year. He agreed with that plan, so we toured the area and then flew to Madrid for New Year's eve and a day or two there. From there to Washington DC for a few days and finally to Texas.

When I went into the office on the 8th of Jan. I was told they needed me to cover a short eight-month contract at the Patuxent River Naval Air Test Center in Maryland. I left a couple of days later and drove up to find a house to rent from a professor at Saint Mary's College nearby. He and his wife were going on a sabbatical to Europe for eight months. It had a dock on the Chesapeake Bay exactly what we needed,

to relax and unwind after the stress in the last days in Iran. Cindy and Amy stayed behind. My Dad wanted to take them to the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo, so they flew up a few weeks later.

In Aug 1979 we returned to Texas and I joined a program on the commercial side of the house at Bell Helicopter to become a Field Rep on the Model 222, that Bell was developing. Other than the Bell 47 Model, it was the first Helicopter we built that was not originally funded by the US Government. It was a twin-engine helicopter designed as an Executive Transport for Corporations but could be adapted to many other roles such as EMS, Law Enforcement and Offshore Drilling and eventually a derivative military use.

We got back to Texas just in time for our son Ethan to be born in Texas as a 6th generation Texan. That was important to me! Both of our children were born in the Jones Tower at Harris Methodist in Fort Worth, just across I-30 from the warehouse where I worked in 1964.

When we eventually started deliveries of the Bell 222 we had positions for four dedicated Reps for the 222. I put my name in the hat to cover Europe, the Middle East, and Africa and it was granted. In April 1980 I delivered the first one to Europe, sold to our dealer in Nurnberg Germany. We brought it into Frankfurt, partially disassembled, on a cargo flight out of DFW. I assembled it in Lufthansa's maintenance facility, with the aid of a mechanic from our dealership in Germany. A Bell Pilot had arrived to fly it and we took it to Hannover Air Show where we used it as a demonstrator. Following the air show we took the aircraft to Nurnberg to the dealer's facility. I liked what I saw in Germany and decided to make Nurnberg my base of operation for EMEA and rented a house nearby. In July I received another 222 for Norway via sea freight and delivered it to ScanCopter, a large offshore operator in the North Sea.

At the end of Aug, I went back to Texas, bringing my family to Germany just in time for me to depart the next morning for the Farnborough Air Show in England, while Cindy had to find the DOD dependents school in Erlangen that I had arranged for Amy to enroll in, by paying tuition. Amy was starting the next morning in the 5th Grade, and it was the first time she had sat in a class with other students, in lieu of Cindy's homeschooling.

But Cindy is now a seasoned expatriate, and she took care of business. She found the school and got Amy in class on time. Amy adapted quickly and was the top student, ahead of the 5th grade curriculum. BTW, Ethan got his first passport when he was six months old and was 10 months old when we arrived in Germany.

The next few months were hectic. When I finished the Air Show in England I was meeting new deliveries in South Africa, Yugoslavia and Oman one right after another, with some assembly required. Eventually things settled down a bit, and we got into the flow of things, and we were thoroughly enjoying our life there.

By 1984, we had delivered several Bell 222's into my area and it was time to blend them in letting the various Reps in the area take on support of the 222 with the other Bell models they were supporting. A piece of Western Europe was carved out for me to cover all models. As the only flights to Greenland in those days originated in Copenhagen, Denmark, that was part of my area as well.

When Amy graduated High School from the DOD school in Nurnberg in 1988 we decided to move to Munich. Munich had more direct flights to other destinations. There Ethan went into 4th grade at the Munich International School, and Amy enrolled in University of Maryland that had a two-year campus in Munich.

Soon after moving to Munich, I was promoted to Lead the support team for EMEA. In addition to leading the team, I still had a large piece of Europe that I was the front line of support. We were a team of eight including me. These men were all "self-starters" and motivated. Incidentally the area we were covering

was roughly 1/3rd of the earth's landmass North to South from Tromso Norway to the Cape of Africa, East to West from Nuuk, Greenland to Muscat, Oman.

By 2002 we were empty nesters and moved over the Alps to Northern Italy near Lake Como and the Southern border of Switzerland. I continued as Manager of the EMEA support team but added a small role with a program of cooperation between Bell and Augusta (Now Leonardo) a manufacturer of helicopters that had manufactured Bells under licenses since 1952. The program included joint ownership in development of the AB139 and the 609 Commercial Tiltrotor. My involvement dealt with our future joint support of the AB139.

As empty nesters, Cindy traveled often with me including trips to South Africa, Dubai, Montreal for meetings at Bell Canada, and of course every time I came back to Fort Worth for training or meetings.

Finally in 2004 I decided it was time to repatriate as I'm thinking of early retirement. We loaded a 40' high bay container plus a 20' high bay container and came home in time for thanksgiving in 2004. In 2005 we purchased 48 acres with a house and a couple of barns near Decatur, Texas. I continued to work from an office at home as Manager of a support Team covering the Eastern Half of the USA. I still had many of my own customers in North Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Kansas. The majority of my customers were in the DFW Metro area.

We bought ten pairs of crossbred Angus/Brangus 1st calf heifers and a young purebred Angus Bull. I'm getting back to my roots. Katrina turned New Orleans into something that made us realize we did not want to stay in the vicinity of a large metropolitan area in retirement. In addition to that, I wanted to run more cows in a cow calf operation and needed more land

I retired the month I had my 62nd birthday in 2007. In 2008 we purchased 224 acres near Naples in NE Texas. It had good grass with some timber but no structures and old fencing. We built a shop with living quarters beginning in Jan 2009 and put the Decatur property on the market. The economy experienced a downturn as we were doing this, so it took a while to get it sold. When it was sold we built a house in Naples and moved into it in May 2015. In the meantime, we were increasing our herd to four registered Angus Bulls and ninety plus crossbreed cows. Over the years beginning early in our marriage, we purchased tracts of land in Johnson, Comanche, and Lamar counties. Once settled, we started doing 1031 real-estate exchanges getting everything gathered up here in NE Texas. We now operate 312 acres of cow/calf and hay production and another 219 acres of timber farming, primarily in planted pines with some hardwood

That said; a couple of years ago I started to downsize the cattle operation, leasing some of our pastures and selling some of our cows to a young man (Micky Carter Jr.) that was born in 1974 into cattle ranching. I kept the 40 + acre pasture that surrounds our headquarters. We share the hay barn and the covered working pens facilities.

Today we are only running eighteen cows and two bulls on the 40 acres but that is enough to keep me busy these days and our freezers full of beef for our consumption and give some to family and friends. We sell a few calves also.

2. How did your military experience influence your career path

Goes without saying again, it was the complete foundation.

3. Have you been involved in veterans' organizations, civic groups, or community service?

I am a Life Member of the HA(L)-3 Seawolf Association and the Distinguished Flying Cross Society. But I must say I have not been very active in either.

4. Have you mentored others or continued serving in leadership roles

As mentioned, I was the senior enlisted Petty Officer on Det 7 my last three months in country mentoring the young men in the team and a leader of Support Teams for Bell Helicopter.

Today I serve as an Elder at Oak Ridge Baptist in Maretta, TX. Late in my life here in East Texas, starting in 2017 I have served by teaching adult Sunday School through expository teaching (verse by verse) through Books of the Bible. I don't have seminary training but today there are lots of resources online, and we have a pretty good library in our home, of Bible commentaries written by Bible scholars and giants of the faith. Our Pastor also has an extensive library to draw from. Our young pastor today at Oak Ridge is an exceptional leader and excellent mentor to me as well

X. Marriage, Family & Personal Life

1. Are you married or were you married? Please share names and dates if comfortable.

I went to Tulsa in 1969 to get more education in the field of aircraft maintenance. Marriage was not on my mind. But I met Cynthia Lee Addington at a place called "The Factory where good times are manufactured, where young people gathered that had live music. It was a large metal building, and I guess if it had been used as a business, it was likely fabricating something for the oil industry.

I was there alone and four ladies came in and sat at a table near me. I went over and asked this beautiful young lady with long auburn hair seated on the side nearest me if she would like to dance. The band played Poke Salad Annie, we danced and I was smitten. The next song was a slow dance, and we embraced and had a little conversation. She sat at my table and we continued the conversation. I drove her home. That evening blossomed into a love story.

As I was completing my studies at Spartan, we married in a simple ceremony in the pastor's office at the Baptist church she had attended earlier. That was 56 years ago, and we have traveled the world together and raised two very successful children. Cindy is the kind of person who is loved immediately by everybody who knows her. Our kids could not have wished for a better mother, nor could I have wished for a better wife. She is very capable at many things, loves all children, and has taught little ones over the years wherever we were living in Sunday School. Here she continues that at Oakridge Baptist and also teaches two- and three-year-olds at the Community Bible Study on Thursdays in Mt. Pleasant.

2. Do you have children or grandchildren?

Amy Dawn married Tim Creech and they have one son Grady Creech, 19 years of age.

Amy completed her BS degree at UNT in Denton in 1993. Her degree was in Human Resources. She has been very successful in that role. After some entry-level jobs, she went to Mary Kay Corp. as a manager of Compensation & Remuneration and was instrumental in opening up China for Mary Kay. She made many trips there developing job descriptions and pay scales for employees in a manufacturing facility, in addition to training a counterpart there. From there she joined Ball Corporation in Broomfield, Colorado. She traveled five continents for them and had a team of locals in several countries who worked under her guidance. From there she came back to the DFW area to work for OmniOn Power, formerly ABB Power, a Swiss company that was sold without Human Resources support. Recently she was hired by a private

equity firm in Fort Worth to work for a new company they are forming in Boston by merging two software companies they recently purchased into one company. Her skills are in high demand.

Ethan Dwayne Bell married Julia Czech, and together they have two children: Juniper Swain, 13 years of age, and Ignatius Liska, 10 years of age in April (AKA Iggy).

Ethan also completed a BA in English at UNT in 2004. He then moved to Seattle and enrolled in the Seattle Maritime Academy. Upon completion he went to work in the maritime industry. Cindy and I visited the Seattle Maritime Academy in 2012, several years after Ethan had studied there. The Director of the Academy told me Ethan was the best student that had been through during his tenure there. Ethan did his internship as an able-bodied seaman with the Military Sealift Command delivering ammunition to U.S. armed forces facilities all over the Pacific theater of operations. He then worked a few jobs, including on a Columbia University research vessel and a sea-going tug that pulled barges loaded with coal from Mississippi to Puerto Rico.

He enrolled in Pacific Maritime Institute in Seattle to become an officer and 3rd Mate. Following completion, he joined Conoco Phillips and sailed as a 3rd mate for several years. He married during this time and eventually left the maritime industry to be more involved in raising his kids.

He drove an over-the-road truck while working on getting his Texas Teacher Certificate. After four years teaching 3rd grade in Denton ISD, today he is in a program as an Assistant Principal Intern while he completes a fast-track curriculum for a Master's degree and certification from the TEA as a Principal. He is carrying a 4.0 grade average in his studies at UNT.

He recently partnered with a business owner on the Square in Denton (Gary Barnhart), forming a non-profit after-school enrichment program that extends literacy beyond the classroom. Field trips connect students with people, stories, and the landmarks of Denton. They are looking at expanding that program.

3. How would you describe your role within your family?

Scripture tells us the husband is to be the head of the household, so I have tried to be faithful to that. It goes on to tell the husband he is to love his wife like Christ loves His church. That sets the bar high. We are to love our wives sacrificially if we love like Christ. He died for His Church. You can be sure I would defend my family at the peril of my own life. I have put my life on the line for my country; I would certainly do the same for my family. Aside from protecting, I have worked diligently to provide for the family and have tried to be an encouragement and a good role model, to inspire them to reach their potential. Nobody (except Cindy) is a perfect role model, but I strive for that.

4. What are some cherished family memories you would like preserved?

I have cherished memories in Iran, teaching Amy how to ride a bike and horses. The many hours riding with her along the Halil river that ran through the valley near Kermanshah.

In Germany, the many volksmarches that we participated in when the kids were little. Visiting the small summer fests in the local villages. At Christmastime, visiting the Christmas Markets in Nurnberg and Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Sledding on the hills around home.

We all learned to ski on a Christmas vacation in Italy when Ethan was six. Afterwards, we skied on season passes at the nearby ski resort or drove a couple of hours into Austria to ski the glaciers. The upper elevations on the glaciers were open year-round.

Taking the family with me on trips during the summer while they were out of school and tour places like Yugoslavia or Spain while I was conducting scheduled visits with Bell customers. That became a tradition.

XI. Reflections & Legacy

1. What does military service mean to you today?

My service had a very positive impact on my life. I am proud of the men and women today who serve our country in a highly professional way. I am thankful there are still men and women who are willing to serve our country in that way. The life we enjoy in this country today is only possible because of the sacrifices they make to protect and defend our country. The old adage is true, "The best defense is a strong offense," to deter those who would like to destroy us.

2. How do you hope your service will be remembered?

I hope in a positive way.

3. What lessons from your life would you like future generations to learn?

I think JFK hit the nail on the head with his quote I shared earlier.

"Ask not what your country can do for you --- ask what you can do for your country."

I'm not sure that resonates with many in today's generation. It did not in mine either. I know some men in my generation at Azle High School who went to Canada to avoid serving their country. I knew even more who married only to avoid the draft, but their marriages didn't last.

4. What advice would you give to young people considering military service?

With today's leadership, the funding, and the respect that is afforded those that serve I would recommend it, before or after college.

When Ethan was growing up, I did not discourage him from joining, but I didn't encourage it either. After Vietnam, we had some administrations that neglected the Armed Services. As an example, look at the fiasco in 1979 when we tried to free the hostages imprisoned and held captive in Iran. It took the Gulf War for the country to get behind our Armed Forces again and cheer them on. The phrase "Thank you for your service" was coined from the success of our troops in that war.

The first time anyone ever said that to me (even though I knew my family appreciated my service) was in 2006 in Greenville, Texas. I was visiting with an EMS operator and was out on the tarmac doing a walk-around of their Bell 407 with the mechanic answering some questions he had. A man who appeared to have American-Italian heritage, wearing dark sunshades, came walking up. He introduced himself as an FAA safety inspector and said he was going to do a ramp check of the helicopter and paperwork. I introduced myself as the Bell Helicopter Representative, and he asked why I was there. When I explained, he asked if I was a veteran and then, based on my age, he guessed Vietnam. When I said yes, he immediately said, "Thank you for your service." I choked up! He was a Gulf War vet, and I

returned the thanks. The ramp check was left by the wayside as he questioned me about my tour in Vietnam.

5. Is there anything we have not asked that you would like to share?

I have already written a book probably more than you will have time to use in a podcast so I will pass on this one.

XII. Closing & Archival Notes

1. Are there photographs, documents, medals, or memorabilia you would like included with this story?

If I have time I will do a little digging to see.

2. May your story be preserved for educational or historical purposes?

Yes

3. How would you like your service to be summarized in one sentence?

I'm proud of my service and do not wish to downplay it nor that of anyone else. But the question reminds me of a missionary named C.T. Studd, born in England in 1860, who after graduating from Cambridge University became a missionary to China, India, and Africa. Somewhere along the way he wrote a poem titled "Only One Life." The following one-liner is repeated eight times in the poem:

"Only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last".