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(0:00:22 – 0:00:39) Jessica Williams: It is February 17, 2015. We're at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum. Um, I'm Jessica Williams and I'm interviewing Brian Walker, who was a pilot on board Intrepid in 1967. So, Brian, if you don't mind saying your name and when you served on Intrepid and what your role was on Intrepid?

(0:00:39 – 0:01:07) Brian Walker: Uh, my name is Brian Walker. I served on the Intrepid, uh, beginning early 1967. And, uh, finished, uh, late December '67, after a tour in Vietnam. Um, my role, I was assigned to, uh, VA-34, Carrier Air Wing 10, uh, as a pilot, as a Lieutenant Junior Grade when I was in VA-34, on the Intrepid.

(0:01:08 – 0:01:20) Jessica Williams: Excellent. Thank you for, thank you for sitting down, um, with us today. So, we'll start going way back, um, to your, to your early days. I'm wondering if you can tell me, uh, where you grew up?

(0:01:20 – 0:01:42) Brian Walker: I grew up in Plainfield, Wisconsin which is a town of 600-and-some people, in north central Wisconsin. Uh, very small town, uh, I had 40 kids in my graduating high school class, I think – which encompassed, like, three counties. So I come from a, from a rural, small-town setting.

(0:01:42 – 0:01:47) Jessica Williams: And what made you become interested, interested in flight?

(0:01:47 – 0:03:31) Brian Walker: Well, I, my first recollections of flying were, after World War II, uh, a lot of guys that came back from World War II had a GI Bill thing. And most of them didn't want to go to school, but they could, they could do a lot of things with it. And a lot of 'em took flying lessons. In a little town like Plainfield, there were probably three or four guys that had little Piper Cubs and they learned to fly under the GI Bill. And we'd go out and hang out at the airport and they would take us for rides. Of course, our parents didn't know we were going, that, they wouldn't have cared, I don't think. (laughs) But, uh, you know, so, that was my first exposure to flying. And really didn't have a lot of that, after that. Uh, went on through, through

college, uh, in Wisconsin. I had a brother that was three years older than I was, that, uh, went to the Air Force Academy and graduated in the Air Force Academy; and he was an Air Force pilot. Uh, he was in Vietnam the same time I was, stationed in Thailand. But, uh, I guess the thing that, when you come right down to it, the thing that drove me into aviation was that when I graduated from college, I was single. I was a 1-A for the draft. So, you didn't have a lot of choices. Your choices were either you join and do what you want to, or you get drafted and you go as a, in the infantry, as a grunt. So, I decided, uh, after talking to my brother about flying and, uh, you know, what, uh, what he liked about it, and what he didn't like about it – that I would attempt to join the Navy Flight Program, which I did when I was at college at Stout.

(0:03:31 – 0:03:34) Jessica Williams: And why did you choose the Navy instead of the Air Force?

(0:03:34 – 0:03:56) Brian Walker: Realistically, they were the only ones that came on campus and, uh, I think the other thing is the Air Force was getting most of their pilots out of the ROTC program or out of the Academy. Uh, the Navy at the time, uh, was simply looking for pilots. I don't know if any of the other, the other, if the Air Force was at the time.

(0:03:56 – 0:04:01) Jessica Williams: Do you, uh, recall some memories from your flight training?

(0:04:01 – 0:09:20) Brian Walker: Uh . . . (laughs) . . . other than the, the first 16 weeks or so, which were Officer Candidate School, where we had to go through the, you know, the gunnery sergeants. But we had Marine Corps drill instructors, uh, and they didn't much care for college students. The only thing they hated worse than college students were, uh, Naval Academy students. (laughs) But, uh, but that was, uh, that was my indoctrination in the military, it was in the Navy through 16 weeks. And then, after we graduated from there, we were commissioned ensigns in the Navy and started flight training at Saufley Field in Pensacola. Uh, it was not something that was familiar to me. I mean, I think I was pretty well mechanically inclined, but I'd never really flown an airplane since I was a young kid. Uh, but, uh, I worked hard at it. I liked at it, I think I had some natural abilities. After I had, uh, graduated, or did my solo flight in T-34s at Saufley Field, we transferred to T-28s at Whiting Field, which was also just outside of Pensacola. But when I was at, uh, Saufley Field, I was flying the T-34 which is – I'm sure you've got one here, and you've got a T-28 up on deck; I saw that when I was coming . . . I used to walk out on the flight line, uh, to go flying in the, in the T-34. And these T-28s would come taxiing down the back flight line and (laughs), I'd just look at those things and I'd just, I really wanted to fly that airplane, and these guys didn't sit in the airplane – they sat on top of it. And there's a big 1800-horsepower engine that's chugging along behind the lines. So that, that was kind of impressive. So when I graduated from, uh, VT-1 and T-34s, they ask whether you want to go on

the jet pipeline, or do you want to go on the prop pipeline. And I had good enough grades where I could have gone either way. So I told them I wanted to go on the prop pipeline, which surprised most of 'em, because most guys wanted jets. But I wanted to fly that T-28; I mean, I just kind of fell in love with it. So, I went to Whiting Field and, uh, and flew in T-28s. Went through the basic training. Did my first carrier landings on the Lexington in the T-28. And again, after you graduated from basic flight training, which that was, and then you go on to advanced training in Texas, you get another choice, whether you want to fly jets or if you want to fly prop planes. And at that time, I was kind of enamored with Sky Raiders and T-28s and that, so I decided I'd like to stay in the prop pipeline. So after I did my carrier qualifications, they asked me where I wanted to go, and I said I'd like to go to Corpus Christi and fly props. And there were seven of us that carrier qualled that day, T-28s. And I was the only one that asked for props, and I wound up being the only one that got jets. (laughs) So I went into the commanding officer and, uh, asked, "You know everybody's told me, as I've been going through the program that, uh, you know, keep your grades up, keep your grades up and, uh, you can go wherever you want to go." So I said, "Well, what happened?" He said, "Well, you kept your grades a little bit too high 'cause anybody with over a 3.4 automatically goes to the jet pipeline." I says, "Why didn't you tell me that last week?" He says, "Because I didn't want to tell you last week" – (smiles), knowing that I could have affected my grades . . . which I wouldn't have done.

(0:07:32) But after I got there, I was very happy that I was in the jet pipeline. I do remember my first flight in an F-9 at at Beeville, Texas. My instructor was a Marine Corps captain, uh, Captain Korman, I believe. And I think they assigned me specifically to him because not a lot of guys were coming out of the jet pi, or out of the prop pipeline into the jets, going into advanced training. Uh, most of them were coming out of Meridian, Mississippi and they'd already flown the T-2 Buckeye, which was a jet airplane. So, they assigned me to Captain Korman and, uh, and my first flight in the F-9, I was sitting in the front seat. And I took off, of course I'd done my homework and studied. And, uh, went through the routine. Added power, took off, picked up my landing gear and all the same things you do with a prop plane. And about 20 minutes into the flight, Captain Korman comes up on the intercom and he says, "You're trying to figure out what to do with your hands, aren't you?" (laughs) I says, "Yes, I am!" Because flying a jet really is quite simple, compared to flying a big prop airplane 'cause, you know, in a T-28, every time you change the power setting, you had to adjust your fuel mixture, you had to adjust your prop speed, your cowl flaps, your trim. Your hands are just constantly moving from one thing to the other. And when I got in the jet, the trim button was on the stick and your left hand was on the throttle. Your right hand was on the stick. And that was all there was to it you know (laughs) So you can sit there and finally he must have realized, you know, I'm kinda looking for things to do. And he says, "You're, you're looking for something to do with your hands, aren't you?" He said, "Relax. Just fly the airplane . . ." and so, it was, it was fun.

(0:09:20 – 0:09:23) Jessica Williams: Do you, um, were you happy then, with the switch to jets, in the end?

(0:09:23 – 0:09:57) Brian Walker: Oh, yeah. Very much so. Very much so. Uh, especially going into attack airplanes. I mean, I always considered the fighter pilots, you know, up in the sky, borin' around, you can't . . . when you, the difference between flying an A-4 and flying jets is, you do a lot of low-level flying. And you don't get a sensation of speed when you're flying at 35,000 feet, unless somebody's right next to you or coming the other way. But, uh, doing low-level attacks and low-level navigation was really a lot of fun, really a lot of fun. A good way to fly an airplane.

(0:09:57 – 0:10:02) Jessica Williams: Was there an opportunity for you to choose fighter versus attack? Or did you just get, the Navy just sent . . .

(0:10:02 – 0:10:48) Brian Walker: No, they give you another choice, uh, I believe, when I was getting out of, uh, advanced training at Beeville, Texas. The last thing we did there, most of the time we flew the F-9 and we went through the basic navigation, formation, dive-bombing; that sort of thing. And the last thing we did is, we switched over to the F-11, uh, and did air-to-air gunnery. So that was the fighter aspect of the whole thing and, uh, you know, did some tactical-type flying. But, uh, what I really liked to do was, was low-level weapons delivery and that sort of thing – which I was pretty good at. So, no, I, I enjoyed that.

(0:10:48 – 0:10:53) Jessica Williams: Did you have any scary moments during your training?

(0:10:53 – 0:12:07) Brian Walker: Uh, I lost in five, three, three-and-a-half, or five years that I was flying, I guess – I lost two engines. I lost one in a T-28, uh, when I was doin', uh, doin', uh, acrobatics under the bag; I was flying in the backseat of a T-28 and I was doing, I was at the top of a loop. You know, I got up here (gestures with hands) and I was upside down and all of the sudden I heard this big "Bang!" and just, it got deadly quiet, and my instructor said, "Okay, pop the bag." He says, "I've got it." And the first thing I saw when I lowered the bag that I was under, was this prop standing straight up and down in front of me (gestures in up-and-down motion), and I thought, "That's not good." But, uh, fortunately, when we were at the top of the loop, we had enough altitude that, uh, you roll the plane back over and, uh, we were probably six or seven miles away from one of the outlying fields. And this guy was good. He put it right into the box at the outlying field with no engine. Uh, so, that was probably the scariest thing, I guess – I can't think of too many other things that, uh, that went wrong when I was in the training command.

(0:12:07 – 0:12:08) Jessica Williams: Yikes, well . . .

(0:12:08 – 0:12:47) Brian Walker: The other time I lost an engine was later in my career when I was flying off the Forrestal, I was in the A-4. I'd just gone off the catapult and I was probably climbing out at 500 - 600 feet; and all of the sudden "whooooo" – the engine starts winding down. Going through everything and I immediately switched down, flipped it onto emergency fuel and I could hear it starting to wind up again. Well, which was not, the procedural thing to do was at that altitude, you just get out, you eject. I thought I'd give it a shot before I got out, and I got lucky, and the engine lit and I got, uh, brought it back to the ship. So . . .

(0:12:47 – 0:12:52) Jessica Williams: Tell me a little bit about carrier qualifications in your training.

(0:12:52 – 0:16:25) Brian Walker: Uh, in the T-28, uh, coming aboard a carrier is a lot different than it is comin' in a jet. Uh, the T-28 had an 1800-horse, 3-blade prop. And it was probably the most forgiving airplane I ever flew. I mean, if you got in trouble with a T-28, you just open the throttle and it would just eat its way out of it. So, but on the other hand, when you did carrier landings, or when you landed a T-28, uh, you came in 'til the point where the LSO saw you were lined up and over the deck, and he'd give you a flash of the lights – you cut your power. And at that point, the airplane just settles into the wires. And you get used to that. And that's the last thing you want to do when you're flying a jet. And again, if you read Bernie's book, you know he might have made some comments about (laughs) a couple landings I made where I kinda maybe pulled the power back a little much, to come aboard. But, uh, but the difference being is, if you add power on a T-28, it's there immediately. So, you know, if I missed the wires or something, I can hit the power from zero, from "idle" and get back up to power and take off again, and go around on a bolter. But in a jet, that's just the opposite, uh, so when I was flying the F-9 to do my carrier qualifications, you know, I had to learn that you did not come in over the deck and reduce your power. You flew the airplane into the wires. And you flew at the same power setting you did when you were a quarter mile out. And, uh, that's, that's the biggest difference. And the reason being – (clears throat), is, in the F-9, at least, and most jets, the power response is not immediate. So, when you, if you come to, into the wires on a jet, and you bolter, you miss the wires, and you go to full power, you're already about 80 or 85 percent power. So that's all you have to go. But if you came in at "idle" and tried to add power in a jet, by the time you got to the end of the deck, I mean, you'd just, you'd go in the water 'cause the power wouldn't be there. So that's, that's the biggest thing. But, uh, I [enjoyed] . . . flying the T-28 when, we had to come out, we made four touch-and-go landings, I believe. And then, four arrests. And the first two, the first time I'd ever seen an aircraft carrier (laughs) was when I

came out to the Lexington in the Gulf of Mexico, in, uh, in the T-28. And of course, we're all flying solo 'cause instructors don't ride with you when you're (laughs) making your first carrier landings. And, uh, the first touch-and-gos were a little nervy, at least – that's your first contact with a carrier. But it wasn't that bad. And by the time I'd made my four arrests, I tried to get back in the pattern after I was . . . they sent me home. I thought, maybe I'll just get one more. And they caught me and they sent me home. But I enjoyed it. Uh, the first time I made my night landings on a carrier, was probably one of the most stressful things I ever did in my life. I mean, that was tough. Uh, daytime, I won't say I ever got used to 'em, that never became routine. But, uh, night landings, night carrier operations are highly stressful – at least they were then. I assume they still are.

(0:16:25 – 0:16:31) Jessica Williams: Can you let us into your head a little bit? What would you be thinking as you're approaching to land on the carrier at night?

(0:16:31 – 0:18:05) Brian Walker: Concentration. Focus, focus, focus. I mean, uh, you've got, I'll tell you a little anecdote. But when you're, when you're coming in at night, you got your power indicator, which is sitting up on your dash, and it's nothing more than a circle, and an upside-down chevron, an inverted "V" on the bottom, and a "V" on the top; and those are your speed indicators. And you keep that ball on "zero." That means you're on speed. If you go, if the speed goes up, if you're slow; if it goes on the bottom "V," you're fast. And then your other focus is on the ball and the lineup. And the ball gives you your glide slope; and your lineup is determined, when you're flying at night, by a droplight that comes off the back of the ship. It comes off the fantail and it's lined up with the center line of the deck. And if you're lined up properly, either this way or that way, that droplight will appear on a straight line with the deck lights on the angled deck. If you're one side or the other, there will be a little bit of a v-formation out of that. So, you concentrate on your airspeed, which is critical. You concentrate on the ball, which is critical – and your lineup, which is also critical. So those are three things, and if you can't concentrate and focus on those three things, and any movement of one of those things, you got to make a correction. And you just fly those things until you hit the deck. And that's all you see.

(0:18:06 – 0:18:55) This section has been redacted as per the narrator's request.

(0:18:56 – 0:19:04) Brian Walker: It's just, concentration, focus and recognizing when something is startin' to move. That's what carrier work is about.

(0:19:05 – 0:19:07) Jessica Williams: I'm sure, it sounds very intense.

(0:19:07 – 0:19:11) Brian Walker: It is intense. Night time is intense.

(0:19:11 – 0:19:18) Jessica Williams: So, you've gone through all of this. You've gone through all of your training. Um, tell me about your squadron assignment after finishing your training.

(0:19:18 – 0:22:11) Brian Walker: Well, after we left Corpus Christi, uh, again, we had a choice. I chose attack, attack aircraft and A-4s. I mean, it just kinda looked like the sports car of the air world to me at the time. So, uh, I got assigned to VA-44, which was the RAG squadron in Jacksonville, Florida. And you also had the choice, you could choose east coast or west coast. And I chose east coast, mainly because I'd never been to the west coast. And actually, probably had never been to the east coast, either, by the time I graduated from there. But, uh, so I chose east coast and I chose A-4s and the Replacement Air Group Squadron for A-4, uh, plane was at Jacksonville, Florida. So I went through the, the RAG over there, which in, the curriculum for the A-4 was dive-bombing, low-level navigation, nuclear delivery, uh, you know, formation flying. All of the things that you do in attack airplane. So, uh, I went through that program at the time and, uh, got orders to VA-34, which was just a couple hangars away. Uh, I joined them, I think, I don't know what month it was; but they had just returned from, uh, a NATO cruise on the Saratoga. Uh, so a lot of the guys that got back from that cruise, I knew and I flew with – but they got orders to other places. Uh, and then, uh, we immediately got orders to the Intrepid, uh, knowing we were, we were probably assigned to go to Vietnam, but, uh, in early 1967. So, that was, that was my introduction to VA-34. Met a lot of the guys, a lot of the characters that were, were in the squadron and, uh, at that time and, a lot of them left right after that, uh – Charlie Stender, a lot of guys that, uh, they were there. But, uh, guys that we went to Vietnam with, most of 'em were there. I was the first pilot to join VA-34 after they got back from, from, uh, uh, on the Saratoga. And then, a lot of the, several guys – after I was, or after I got there – also came out of the RAG and were assigned to VA-34. So there were a lot of junior officers in VA-34 at the time. Two of the guys that were in Triple Sticks, or roomed with us, uh, were on the Saratoga cruise. And then, Bernie and I were kinda new to the squadron. So . . .

(0:22:11 – 0:22:24) Jessica Williams: I'm gonna go back to VA-34 and Intrepid and everything. But one question, one thing I wanted to follow up on – you described the A-4 as being like a sports car? I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about the aircraft. What it was like to fly?

(0:22:24 – 0:26:40) Brian Walker: It was just a fun airplane to fly and, uh, you know, durable. It was, it was extremely maneuverable. Uh, the A-4 C model was not quite as fast as an E model, which had a different engine. Uh, but, uh, it, uh, you could, uh, you could do almost anything in it. You know, you could do a lot of low-level navigation. They didn't have the electronics that you have today. I mean, our navigation at the time . . . and one of the things that we spent a great deal of time on in the, in training, in the RAG group, was the low-level navigation, where

they'd assign us a target, uh, from Jacksonville. Maybe up in the Blue Ridge Mountain area of Tennessee. And it would be a dam. And we would have to draw out the navigation route and assume that at some point we were gonna be picked up by radar. And so, we would fly out of Jacksonville and a profile would, maybe we'd climb up to 20,000 feet. And we'd fly up into northern Georgia and then drop down, assuming we were under radar, uh, being able to, picked up to radar. We would drop down to 100 feet, 150 feet off the ground and try to go into the target, which would be a dam, with, uh, without being detected. In order to do that, flying low level, you had no navigation aids, 'cause you can't pick up TACANs. Or you can't pick up, uh, VORs or things like that. So, you lay out this, this map which you draw on the big, you know, maps that they give you in the, in the navigation room. And you lay out your, your headings, your distances, in a line; and you write those on the map. Time and second, down to the second. Speed that you're gonna maintain a constant 360 knots or a mile a minute. Uh, I mean, a mile every six seconds, is what it amounts to, at 360. But, uh, you lay out that route and then, you cut that map into six-inch strips. And you take, uh, rubber cement and you paste them all together, and then you fold them; and you sit there and you get a kneeboard and you put that map on your kneeboard. And as you're going, you have checkpoints that you hit.

(0:24:57) So, when you drop down from the high-altitude portion, you find your first checkpoint at, uh, which may be a highway bridge. It may be a water tower, whatever you picked up. And you got that. And then you got your next heading – turn to heading 320. And I fly that way for 37 seconds. And at 37 seconds, I should hit my next point, which may be a railroad crossing, or something like that. But you pick out these checkpoints as you're laying out this map; and it's all strictly time and distance, and looking. If you miss a checkpoint, you're kinda out of luck; because it's tough to get back on route, and about the only thing you can do then is pop up at altitude, which exposes you to any kind of enemy fire. And then you pop down and continue your map. And then, when you finally hit your target, then you have to do your weapons delivery. If you're simulating a nuclear delivery, you probably do what we call and over-the-shoulder delivery. Or if it were a dam, we would come up to the dam at 500 knots; pull straight up in the air, release our weapon. (gestures upward with arms) So that continues going up. And then, we'd continue over on our back, get back down to a low altitude and be running out before the bomb went up, came back, and detonated. By that time, we'd be out of the area, uh – hopefully. But that was the whole theory. And then you would run out at low-level. So that was the type of thing we did with the A-4. And the A-4 was well-suited for it. It was, uh, it was just a highly-maneuverable airplane, very reliable airplane. Uh, but again, it didn't have a lot of great electronics in it. But for that purpose, we didn't need a lot of electronics.

(0:26:40 – 0:26:45) Jessica Williams: Thank you. And thank you, in particular, for the explanation of those maps. Because we do have some of them in the collection . . .

(0:26:45 – 0:26:45) Brian Walker: Oh, okay.

(0:26:45 – 0:26:52) Jessica Williams: . . . uh, and I think it's also important for people to understand what you were using to navigate. It's not this fancy, high-tech, uh . . .

(0:26:52 – 0:27:55) Brian Walker: We had, another thing, the A-4 . . . we had a gunsight that was, uh, it would correct for a g-load, so it was reflective in your, in your wind screen. And so, if you, in fact, one of my slides . . . I don't know if you have it . . . has a picture in there, where I have somebody up in front of me, covered up by my pipper, which is the, the thing that you aim with in your gun screen, or in your target. And, but in Vietnam they had a habit of, when you hit so many g's going off the catapult, the bulbs burn out. So (laughs), that was your only gunsight. So, before I took off, at least, and I think a lot of guys did . . . we'd turn the gunsight on, see where the pipper was, and we had a grease pencil that we took, and we marked on this, on the wind screen where the pipper would be in a normal situation, without any g's, uh, or any corrections in it. So, a lot of times that's what we were bombing with, in North Vietnam – was a grease pencil mark on the windscreen.

(0:27:55 – 0:27:58) Jessica Williams: That's great, 'cause it solved the problem with the available, the available . . .

(0:27:58 – 0:28:03) Brian Walker: (laughs) Today, they don't do that sort of thing, but that's what we had, so that's what we did.

(0:28:03 – 0:28:25) Jessica Williams: So, getting back to preparing to go on Intrepid – so you're assigned to VA-34 and you're figuring that, um, the squadron's going to be, or the ship is going to be deployed to Vietnam. How closely were you following the war at that point? And can you recall what your personal opinions were about the war at that moment?

(0:28:25 – 0:32:06) Brian Walker: Not very – really. Uh, when I, between getting out of the training command and going to the RAG, I went home and got married. The Navy gave me the good graces of four days' leave, so I'd go to Milwaukee, get married, and come back to Jacksonville. But, uh, so, but really at that point, I didn't think about, a lot about, about, uh, Vietnam. Of course, you read what was in the newspaper, which in 1965, 1964, or '66 – was not nearly as much, uh, that didn't really heat up until '67, '68. And even into the '70s. Uh, there was not a lot of opposition. And I'll tell you, the first time that I really even considered that there was a lot of opposition, or it was a controversial war, at best, was when we came back from Vietnam, when we had completed our combat in December of 1967. They wouldn't let us

fly back to the States until the ship had gone around the, Cape Horn – so it couldn't be called back. Because after the Forrestal burned, and, uh, you know they wanted to call one of the ships back, but they didn't have any pilots. So they'd sent us to the Philippines to stay there, until the ship could not be called back; and then, we flew back to the States.

(0:30:00) So, during that timeframe, which was probably 10 days to two weeks, I got hold of a book by Harrison Salisbury called Hanoi [Behind The Lines – Hanoi], I mean, there was more to it than, but it was essentially, Hanoi. And I read that book and I thought, you know, "This isn't right." You know, this guy was fed so much propaganda; he went to Hanoi, at the invitation of the Vietnamese I guess. You know, which, I don't know why people would do that, but they fed him so much propaganda about the air war in North Vietnam, that he never made any attempt at trying to justify or, or . . . and I'm reading this book and I think, I can't hardly believe that this is the stuff that they're putting out. For example, I mean, if we would go out on an alpha strike, they would fire 20, 30, 40 missiles at us. And maybe one or two of 'em would detonate near one of our airplanes, or maybe one or two of 'em would make contact. Well, the rest of 'em had to come down someplace, and they all had warheads in 'em. And we weren't bombing villages in North Vietnam, but many of the surface-to-air missiles were coming down in the villages in North Vietnam. So they'd trot Harrison Salisbury out to see one of these villages where maybe a SAM came down, I don't know what, and say – well, this is what the Americans are, you know, are bombing. And, you know, I'd, there were instances that I could go to my log book and verify on those sites, you know, what our targets were; and where they had taken him on a given date that he described, and that just wasn't true. But, you know, so that was the, really the first indication that I had gotten, that, uh, this was gonna be a controversial issue. And of course, Jane Fonda's visit which (laughs), not one of our favorite people. But, uh, so when I was there, uh, you know it wasn't anything I took into consideration.

(0:32:06 – 0:32:20) Jessica Williams: And once you . . . this is getting ahead a little bit, but since we're talking about the controversy. Once you were on the ship, to what extent were you and your squadron mates aware of, um, any protests or things like that, back in the States?

(0:32:20 – 0:32:30) Brian Walker: I don't think, nothing significant. I mean, I don't think it was an issue. I mean, I can't recall it being an issue.

(0:32:30 – 0:32:33) Jessica Williams: Certainly you were all focused on other things.

(0:32:33 – 0:32:37) Brian Walker: Other things. Survival. (laughs) Primarily.

(0:32:37 – 0:33:02) Jessica Williams: I want to, I do want to, um, um, dig back into your missions and things like that in a sec. But, um, to, just to catch back to, um, the squadron. So you're assigned to VA-34; you're headed off aboard Intrepid, to Vietnam. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about the culture of that squadron? What the, what it was like? What the people were like?

(0:33:02 – 0:35:08) Brian Walker: You know, it was different for most squadrons. I don't know what made us different, uh, uh – we had a lot of junior officers, uh, that, uh, we weren't the most military and disciplined squadron, which surprised me at the time. Uh, my dad was in World War II. He was in the Navy, he was an enlisted man. Um, my brother was in the Air Force; he was a, he was a F-4 pilot at the time. And so, I had a little bit a, we weren't a strong military family, or didn't have any academy grads, or naval academy people. But, uh, I guess I was quite surprised at the, at the attitudes of the junior officers. Uh, and I will also say that, you know, I wasn't always entirely in agreement, you know, with some of those, those attitudes. I mean, after all, we were still a military outfit. I knew what the military, you know, meant to be; I knew what discipline was. And I knew how it should affect me. Uh, but on the other hand, I was also part of the group that were the junior officers that weren't too happy with the leadership that we had in the squadron. (smiles) So, uh, it was a, obviously we made a lot of close friends in the squadron. We've stuck together, which very few squadrons have ever done. People that I talk to, that were either in the Air Force or lots of other squadrons in the Navy – even the ones on our ship, VA-15, uh, they never got back together. Uh, so I think we had a little closer bond in VA-34 than a lot of the other outfits did. I don't know what created it. I really don't. Combat always has something to do with it. And we were, most of us, were making our first cruise on a combat cruise. So, that, that's probably the thing that created the closeness.

(0:35:08 – 0:35:17) Jessica Williams: And what were, um, you mentioned not necessarily always being happy with the leadership of the squadron? Are you comfortable describing that a little bit?

(0:35:17 – 0:36:40) Brian Walker: Well, I don't want to rail on it. But, uh, no, I, I met, even through the training command, uh, through my time in the Navy, uh, I saw a lot of great leadership. A lot of good senior officers, uh, in other squadrons. It just seemed that in our squadron, we didn't have (laughs), that kind of leadership. And, you've seen some of that described in the "Triple Sticks" book and, uh, you know, I certainly don't feel as strongly as Bernie described it in the book, about that lack of leadership. But, uh, I think we were a stronger squadron, uh, because of the junior officers, than we were because of the senior officers. I mean, there were no slackers; there was nobody that didn't do their job, as a junior officer. I think my attitude at the time, when I got over there, that, uh, after I'd been over North

Vietnam several times, that I really don't see a lot over here that's worth dyin' for, but I'll do my job. So, you give me a target and I'll take care of my target, so . . .

(0:36:40 – 0:36:45) Jessica Williams: We've been talking about Triple Sticks, but we need to really start, I guess . . .

(0:36:45 – 0:36:45) Brian Walker: All right.

(0:35:45 – 0:36:52) Jessica Williams: . . . from the beginning with that. So, um, so tell me – what is Triple Sticks? And tell me about your berthing assignment.

(0:36:52 – 0:39:10) Brian Walker: Well, I'll tell you how Triple Sticks came about. My job in the squadron, other than being a pilot – we all had secondary jobs – was the first lieutenant. Well, the first lieutenant in the squadron is charged, in charge of spaces and quarters and things like that. So, when we first got our assignments, the ship gives the air wing – okay, this is your area; you divide it up how you wanna do it. So, our squadron was assigned so many staterooms for the officers. And the junior officers generally wound up in either four-man rooms, or in some cases, eight-man rooms. And I was one of the junior officers, not the most junior. But I knew, I don't know how I found out, but I knew that this one four-man room, uh, Triple Sticks, did not have air conditioning, uh, on our shakedown cruise. But that somehow, I found out it was going to get an air conditioner. And most of the rooms, very few of the rooms, were air-conditioned. So, I got hold of Bernie, uh, VanLiere, BF, Ben Heald, and said, "You know, if you guys wanna share this room, I'm pretty sure it's gonna have an air conditioner in it." And so, long before anybody else found out about it, we kinda conspired to, to get 0111, uh, as our room. And sure enough, when we went aboard ship to get ready to leave for Vietnam, somebody had cut a hole in the bulkhead and mounted a Sears Roebuck air conditioner in the bulkhead. And that thing ran from the time that we went into the Mediterranean, until we left the line in December. And it just ground away. Now, it didn't keep it 72 degrees in that room. In the Red Sea, it might keep it down to 90, but everybody else was at 110, so that's what kinda got us together in Triple Sticks. It was the fact that it was an air conditioner, and we knew about it, or I knew about it – and nobody else did, so . . .

(0:39:10 – 0:39:10) Jessica Williams: That's good, knowledge is power, right?

(0:39:10 – 0:39:13) Brian Walker: That's how Triple Sticks became Triple Sticks. Yes.

(0:39:13 – 0:39:16) Jessica Williams: And whose idea was it to keep the journal?

(0:39:16 – 0:39:49) Brian Walker: I think it was VanLiere's idea. Uh, and I think VanLiere did most of the writing in the journal. Uh, that was kinda his job. His other job seemed to be that he kinda took on himself, was to handout nicknames. So (laughs), he, uh, he also gave everybody in the squadron a nickname. I was, that's where "Runner" came from. Uh, that's where a lot of the names come. That's probably where The Frog came from (laughs), but I, I think that's where it probably originated.

(0:39:49 – 0:39:54) Jessica Williams: At some point, I'm gonna have to have you look at some of the pages in "Triple Sticks" as handwriting identification . . .

(0:39:54 – 0:39:54) Brian Walker: Okay.

(0:39:55 – 0:40:02) Jessica Williams: . . . would be useful, potentially nickname identification, too. Um, although I guess we could ask, uh, VanLiere about that.

(0:40:02 – 0:40:02) Brian Walker: Sure.

(0:40:02 – 0:40:18) Jessica Williams: Um, so you mentioned the air conditioning being a key feature of what brought you guys all together. I'm wondering if you could talk about, um, your impression of Intrepid, in general, when you first came on board.

(0:40:18 – 0:43:01) Brian Walker: Well, it's really kind of intimidating, uh, even after I had carrier-qualified. I carrier-qualified three different airplanes on the Lexington. Though the Lexington was pretty much a carbon copy of the Intrepid, so I wasn't surprised, from a flying standpoint, you know, how small it was for the type of airplane that we were flying. I mean, that's kind of, that's what they introduced me to, that's what it was, and that's what . . . but to come on something this big, uh, . . . I mean I grew up in small-town Wisconsin (laughs), to come up and see this thing sitting at the pier, uh, there's a lot of steel. And when you come inside of it, it's very intimidating. Uh, I didn't know where anything was. I didn't know how to get around, uh, other than, uh, you know, when we, we first came on it and there were shakedown cruises. But, uh, it's impressive, too. Uh, it was, it was good to be a part of. But the Intrepid, as a ship, had a stellar reputation. Especially under Captain Fair. Uh, Captain Fair was a disciplinarian and, uh, there was the, I mean, we may have lacked some leadership in our squadron, or thought we did, but it wasn't lacking in the ship. Uh, I always remember reading in one of the publications that they put out, that Captain Fair court-martialed one individual for gambling. I thought – how the hell do you court-martial one person for gambling? Wha, he had to be gambling with somebody else, (laughs) couldn't be gambling by himself. But, uh, that's the way Captain Fair was. Uh, so it was, the ship ran like clockwork. We had fewer operational accidents

on the Intrepid, during wartime, than we had on the Forrestal . . . we had fewer operational accidents on the Intrepid during wartime than we had in our next cruise on the Forrestal, uh, just on the NATO cruise. I mean, we lost, the ship lost like, six airplanes just due to accidents. You never saw that on the Intrepid. It was just, it was a ship that ran like, ran like clockwork. Living in Triple Sticks, underneath the starboard catapult, if they said they were gonna launch airplanes at 7:00 a.m., when they fired that catapult you didn't have to look at your watch. You knew it was 7:00 a.m. And, uh, that's the way, that's the way it operated.

(0:43:01 – 0:43:17) Jessica Williams: Um, mentioning Triple Sticks under the catapult made me have a question for you. Can you describe, um, for somebody . . . bring yourself back into Triple Sticks and can you describe what the room looked like? What was in the room? What kinds of things you used to decorate? That sort of stuff.

(0:43:17 – 0:45:06) Brian Walker: As we walked into the room, the, uh, the door sat at a bit of an angle. It wasn't, uh, it wasn't a square. The door sat, just like they cut off a corner and put the door there. On the left-hand side, were two bunks, uh – my bunk was on top. Uh, VanLiere was below me. As you walked in, the bunks were over here (points to right); there were two sets of lockers up against this bulkhead. On the other set of those lockers, were two more bunks; where Bernie had the top bunk. BF had the bottom bunk. And then, across the room on the other, that bulkhead (points forward), there were two desks in which, had desk-dresser, combined-type thing. But, uh, so we, two of us shared a desk on each side of the room. And we had a sink in the room, uh, where we could shave and, uh, you know, brush our teeth and wash our faces. Shower – I can't, you know, I can't really, the shower was down the hall a little bit. But I'm not sure I could locate it if I were in the room right now. But, uh, then above the sink was the air conditioner (laughs), and, uh, that's, uh, that's . . . ran constantly, like I said. But, uh, that was the . . . and then in each bunk, I know my wife made me a set of curtains, so you could pull the curtain over your bunk and get a little privacy if you wanted to, which most of us did, I think. Uh, I can probably describe it a little bit better if I, I don't know if there were any, too many pictures that you could figure out what the room looked like, from, from the slides that I had. But . . .

(0:45:06 – 0:45:09) Jessica Williams: There are some, and we can take, maybe tomorrow we can take a closer look at them . . .

(0:45:09 – 0:45:09) Brian Walker: Yeah.

(0:45:09 – 0:45:18) Jessica Williams: . . . they tend to be, it's such a small room, so it's, you know there's no opportunity for a panorama, but there are, you can see, it looks like you guys had a map on the wall?

(0:45:18 – 0:46:01) Brian Walker: We had a map, uh, we had a map that I think, that kinda tracked us from, we tracked where we went from the time we left Norfolk until the time we got to, got to Yankee Station, Gulf of Tonkin. It was kinda, Triple Sticks was always kinda the gathering room simply because of the air conditioning, and because it was a little bit bigger room than, than most of the two-man rooms. Not much bigger, but it was a little bit bigger. So, when it got really hot, like when we were going through the Red Sea, uh, you know, Snavely'd drag his mattress up into Triple Sticks and sleep on the floor. But, uh, so that's what kinda made it the get-together place. A little bit bigger and a little bit cooler.

(0:46:01 – 0:46:10) Jessica Williams: Um, Bernie talks about some of the antics in "Triple Sticks." But I'm wondering if you have any particular favorite stories of gatherings in your room?

(0:46:10 – 0:47:12) Brian Walker: Well, after reading Bernie's book I think a lot of the people got the impression that there was a lot more goin' on in Triple Sticks than actual was. You know, I mean, drinkin' on a Navy ship was forbidden; I mean, it's somethin' you didn't do. But we did, eh, but the only time we did, I, I don't recall ever drinking except on the night before a stand down day. And stand down days came along about every two weeks. You would have a day where you, you stopped operations. No combat operations the next day. It was a day off. And usually the nights before a stand down day is when the get-togethers in Triple Sticks would happen. So, it wasn't a common, everyday thing. I mean, nobody was drinking while we were flying, uh, that didn't happen. And I think a lot of people that got the impression reading Bernie's book that that was goin' on every night, or goin' on an awful lot more than it did. But it didn't.

(0:47:12 – 0:47:18) Jessica Williams: Good. Fair point. It keeps a perspective on things. Um, but, are, were any of those parties particularly memorable to you? Anything happen?

(0:47:18 – 0:49:18) Brian Walker: Oh, I remember the, the arm wrestling parties. Uh, we had a guy in the squadron, lieutenant commander, Gordon McGruther, that had incredible strength (laughs). We made a lot of money gettin' other squadrons up there, and gettin' into arm wrestling contests with Gordon McGruther. Made a lot of money at it, actually. Uh, I don't know if anybody ever beat him. But, uh, I remember those nights. I remember, uh, I mean, it was amazing, the amount of people we got into that room. I mean, flight surgeons were in there and, uh, I remember some of the, the discussions you get into, the flight surgeons. Uh, I

remember the night that The Frog stuck his fingers in the fan. (laughs) I remember the night that, uh, the guy on the watch, uh . . . I forget, he was on watch up, patrolling the areas up in officers' country, and knocked on the door, and I opened the door and this kid, kid's standin' there and he said, uh, he says, "Sir, there's a dead guy out here in the hall." (laughs) I looked out the door and I don't remember who it was, but somebody had been in the room, been drinking too much (laughs) and passed out, out in the hall. Which, normally I don't think things got that bad, but he was layin' out there (laughs) and this enlisted guy thought he was dead. So I looked out and I says, "Well," I said, "I'll take care of him. You just go on, stop back later and we'll see, see if everything's okay." (laughs) So I went and hauled him back into Triple Sticks and the guy's kinda looking at me like, I don't think he had any idea but I think, after that, people knew what were going on, what was going on up in officer's country on stand down nights. And they didn't send any more watchmen up in, up in officer's country when that was, on, on those nights.

(0:49:18 – 0:49:21) Jessica Williams: Where'd you get the liquor?

(0:49:21 – 0:50:23) Brian Walker: Uh, at the O clubs, uh, and, uh, of course, when we first got to, uh . . . and I think some of the guys, I didn't bring any at first 'cause I had no idea if that was, that would be going on, but I do remember the first shakedown cruise that we went on. I was Dan Snavelly's wingman. And, uh, he and I roomed together on one of the shakedown cruises. And one night, he pulled out a bottle and we had a drink. And I (laughs), I said, I didn't realize this went on. So, I was initiated, as a, as a young junior officer. But it did go on occasionally. So he had brought some, some of his own on, uh. I didn't bring any, but when we got to, uh, uh, Subic Bay in the Philippines; when we left, we went to Subic Bay before we went to Yankee Station. We spent some time on, on liberty there. Uh, I bought some. Everybody else bought some. And, uh, you know, that's where you got it.

(0:50:23 – 0:50:29) Jessica Williams: And I think it's worth mentioning – how old were you at the time all this was happening?

(0:50:29 – 0:50:47) Brian Walker: Uh, let's see. This was 1967. I was 26. 26. Long time ago. (laughs) Almost 50 years. Now I'm 73, so . . .

(0:50:47 – 0:50:54) Jessica Williams: Um, one, one of my colleagues wanted to know – did you play music in your room? And if so, what did you play?

(0:50:54 – 0:51:32) Brian Walker: Well, we had, uh, we all had tape recorders. You had big tape decks, everybody wouldn't have one. We tried to have at least one in our room. And the reason

you had tape recorders is because you couldn't play a record cause the ship's always goin' like this (moves hand back and forth). So, a needle won't stay on an LP or something. So, whoever brought the tape recorder, everybody would bring their own tape decks. They were reel-to-reel, seven-inch reel decks. And yeah, that's, that's what we played. And you could bring, I mean everybody, a lot of guys had headsets, I mean, rather than just crank it up, you know, we'd put the headsets on and plug it in, and listen to it that way, usually.

(0:51:32 – 0:51:36) Jessica Williams: Any artists that were particular favorites of you and your roommates?

(0:51:36 – 0:52:11) Brian Walker: Oh, the Mamas and Papas. Uh . . . I would . . . it's hard for me to think right now, uh, I can remember the Mamas and Papas. I didn't listen to a lot of the popular music at the time. I think, uh, I was into, uh, uh, what do they call it at the time? It wasn't country music, but it was, uh – Peter, Paul and Mary; and the Kingston Trio and, and that group. So . . .

(0:52:11 – 0:52:16) Jessica Williams: Excellent, and I think one of your slides has a photo of somebody wearing headphones, in the room.

(0:52:16 – 0:52:16) Brian Walker: Snavelly.

(0:52:18 – 0:52:18) Jessica Williams: Okay.

(0:52:18 – 0:52:19) Brian Walker: (laughs) I think that's who it was.

(0:52:19 – 0:52:34) Jessica Williams: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Um, so, one other space on the ship I wanna ask you about, before we then kind of get to the, get to your missions – um, is the Ready Room. Can you tell me, um, the significance of the Ready Room? The environment in the Ready Room? What you did in there?

(0:52:34 – 0:55:25) Brian Walker: Well, I mean, that was the hangout, of course. I mean, it was also the official, you know, hangout or, or get-together for the squadron. Uh, the Ready Room always, somebody always had the duty, Ready Room Duty Officer. And it's usually a junior officer. It was always a junior officer. And the good thing about havin' duty of, of, in the Ready Room duty is you didn't fly that day. So, it wasn't a combat situation. So, it, uh, was also where we got together. We did our briefings in the Ready Room if we were gettin' ready to go on a flight. Uh, whoever was leading the flight would do our briefings in the front rows. We had a television set up that, that showed the, the airplanes landing up on the flight deck. So, they

embedded a camera, you know, in the flight deck that looked up the glide slope and you could tell if they were lined up properly, or if they were on glide slope, and how they were coming down. And I do remember . . . we used to watch that and, you know, kind of was always in the background if you're, if you're in the Ready Room. I do remember the night that, uh, I think Bernie described in his book, when Mike Krebs came down lined up way to the right, and (laughs) almost flew into the Island. (laughs) I remember looking up and thought, "Holy God! He's not gonna, he's not gonna make it!" But, uh, so that . . . and we played games in the Ready Room. We played Battleship on paper, and we drew out and played, uh, a lot of guys played Acey-Duecey. Uh, I never learned how to play Acey-Duecey; a lot of guys did. So, it was, and we'd just get together and sit in groups and have conversation. Back of the Ready Room, they always had a big pot of coffee which was generally from World War II, I think, and it was terrible! But (laughs), when that's all there is to drink, that's what you drink. All of our flight gear hung in the back end of the Ready Room, so we would come in; we would do our briefing. We'd go out, walk to the back of the Ready Room, put our g-suits on. Put our life vests on, our Mae Wests, and, uh, all our survival gear and our sidearms and, uh, get dressed and go up to the flight deck, when the call came for pilots to man your airplanes, so, and at the time we'd come out of the flight deck, walk down the passageway a little way, and then we had an escalator that went up to, I can't remember. I remember the escalator; I couldn't tell you exactly where it was or exactly how to get to it. But, uh, that's what we did at the time. And, walked out of the Island and onto the flight deck, found our airplane, manned our airplane. But the Ready Room was just, I mean, that was kind of the center of everything for, for a squadron.

(0:55:25 – 0:55:28) Jessica Williams: Excellent. And tomorrow I'll show you the escalator.

(0:55:28 – 0:55:28) Brian Walker: Okay. (laughs)

(0:55:29 – 0:55:32) Jessica Williams: Yeah, it goes from the Hangar Deck, up to the, into the base of the Island.

(0:55:32 – 0:55:41) Brian Walker: Okay, then we musta had to walk up to the Hangar Deck, cause we were below the Hangar Deck. I think we were just one deck below the Hangar Deck in the Ready Room.

(0:55:41 – 0:55:47) Jessica Williams: Yeah, most of the Ready Rooms were on the level we're on now, which is the Second Deck. Yeah, so, remind me tomorrow; I can re-introduce you to the escalator.

(0:55:47 – 0:56:10) Brian Walker: Okay. VA-15 was right next-door, right next to our Ready Room, so . . . VSF-1 was, I don't know where their, we were the three A-4 squadrons, so, you know, I couldn't locate the Ready Room right now. I couldn't locate . . . Ready Room 3 right now.

(0:56:10 – 0:56:25) Jessica Williams: Great. Um, so, getting back to the ship. Um, when you were on board the ship and when the ship passed through the Suez Canal, um, during, before what would be the Six-Day War, can you describe the, the Suez crossing?

(0:56:25 – 0:58:19) Brian Walker: Well, when we went in, we steamed around in circles for, I don't know how many days. Uh, whether it was simmering, the confrontation between, uh, the Israelis and the Arabs. They weren't, they didn't feel that we were, wanted to get trapped in the Suez. So we steamed around in circles for a couple days out in the Mediterranean, until, I believe, the State Department, you know, got everybody to agree that they were gonna let us go through without, without passing. So, when we went into, I think it's Port Said, to enter the Canal, uh, we had to button-up the ship. I mean, we brought all the airplanes off the Flight Deck. And closed the, every outside door. And, as you got, as we got further into the Canal, on the Egyptian side – well, both sides were Egyptian side, but you could actually hear shells, bouncing off the outside of the ship, whatever, on occasion. Uh, you know some guy would just, thought he'd take a pot shot and take a, so we were, nobody was supposed to be outside on any of the catwalks or on the Flight Deck, or any place else. But, after we'd got through what they considered the combat area, you could, we could go out in certain areas and go up on the Flight Deck. I mean, it's strange to me 'cause it looked like you were goin' through the desert on a ship. You know, you could actually walk up on the Flight Deck, look right straight down, and there was nothing but sand. (laughs) And so, it was, it was strange. But it, uh, it was tense but I, you know, I don't think, uh, I mean, we could, we were helpless. We couldn't fly airplanes. You couldn't, you couldn't launch or land airplanes. So, I mean, we just, we had to rely pretty much on the, their word that they weren't going to start anything while we were in the Canal. So . . .

(0:58:19 – 0:58:26) Jessica Williams: Thanks. Um, so, you're through the Canal. And now, finally, we're getting toward, um, uh, the Gulf of Tonkin. So, really . . .

(0:58:26 – 0:58:31) Brian Walker: First I had to go through the Red Sea, which (laughs), which was nasty.

(0:58:31 – 0:58:32) Jessica Williams: In what way?

(0:58:33 – 0:59:58) Brian Walker: It was hot, humid. It was still. I mean, it was, there was no wind. When you look out in the Red Sea, it's the first place I ever saw flying fishes. The only thing that moved was the flying fish. And of course, VanLiere wondering – why they called it the Red Sea; it wasn't red, so . . . (laughs), but, yes. Out of the Red Sea, through the Straits of Malacca and Indonesia and then, steaming towards the Philippines.

(0:59:58 – 0:59:17) Jessica Williams: So finally you get all the way, halfway around the world. Get to Yankee Station, and getting ready to really do the job you're there to do. Um, I'm wondering if you can recall what was going through your minds, or, um, your squadronmates' minds before your first combat mission?

(0:59:17 – 1:00:21) Brian Walker: First thing I remember, when we got in Yankee Station is, after the evening meal or after dinner at night, we would all get together and walk up on the Flight Deck. And we, the first night that we got to Yankee Station, we're gonna start combat operations the next day. Uh, I remember walking up on the Flight Deck with the other guys in the squadron and just lookin' towards the coast of North Vietnam, uh, couldn't see it. We weren't that close. But we knew it was there. And we knew that we were gonna be there. Uh, it was . . . frightening. We knew we were gonna lose a lot of guys, I mean, we knew that. Just, everybody's hopin' it wasn't gonna be them, I guess. But it was intimidating; I was intimidated. I was a little bit scared, I'll admit it. Uh, it's, uh, it's an unknown.

(1:00:21 – 1:00:25) Jessica Williams: Can you recall your first combat mission? What the, what the target was?

(1:00:25 – 1:02:25) Brian Walker: They didn't really give us targets. I think they knew better. They gave us what they called road recce's or road reconnaissance areas. Go out and see if we could find somethin', drop a bomb on it. And I think they just wanted to get us out there, get us comfortable going over the, over the North Vietnamese coast, knowing that we were in a hostile environment, and we were gettin' shot at. Uh, I do recall, I, my first experience was that, uh, they had given us a road recce in the southern part of the country. And they told us to keep jinkin', I mean, that was the secret to stayin' alive. Was just, keep movin' so that nobody can track ya. (moves arms in jinking motion) And, uh, that's what we did. Same time, you had to keep track of whoever else was in your flight. So, a lot of jinking. And you're all lookin' around, trying to find the target. Very seldom found good targets when you're on a road recce. So, and generally they'd give us an assigned target. After that, just get rid of our ordnance. Say, well there's a small highway bridge at such-and-such a place so if you don't find anything prior to that in road recce, drop your ordnance on that bridge and come on back. So, I think pretty much everybody's first combat mission was a road recce. And then, they'd assign your targets

in larger groups, until, I don't know how long we'd been there. Probably a couple of weeks or a month before we did our first alpha strike. An alpha strike is when you lose your people, because you go on to the big targets and the heavily-defended areas, with a lot of airplanes. And, you know you're gonna lose some. So . . . I, I was probably more afraid of my first alpha strike than I was my first combat strike, which wasn't really combat.

(1:02:25 – 1:02:49) Jessica Williams: One, um, one thing that we've been wondering, um, is – would you be able to describe a specific mission? I bet after a while, they kind of blend together, but we're curious to know, either one alpha strike where you had a particular target, and sort of go from the beginning – in the Ready Room, to the whole process?

(1:02:49 – 1:04:40) Brian Walker: Well, I probably couldn't separate the ones in the, from the Ready Room, from the, the actual flights that we did. Uh, I can describe the alpha strike that I got hit on. Uh, I was, uh, I was assigned, as part of a flak suppressor . . . and on an alpha strike, we all briefed in the Air Intelligence Room. All the pilots that were going on an alpha strike. And a lot of alpha strikes were combined with other ships, with the other ship that may be out in Yankee Station. So we may, maybe send as many as 100-and-some planes on one target – which was pretty impressive. But, uh, on this particular alpha strike, I was assigned as a flak suppressor. And the job of a flak suppressor is to be the first ones on the target, and try to knock out the, the anti-aircraft sites and the surface-to-air missile sites, that, uh, that probably been identified by air reconnaissance photos in previous flights. So, you know where they are, so they can assign . . . and your job is to knock one out. And the one that I remember was, uh, just on the south side of Haiphong, our target was. I don't know if it was an army barracks or what the actual target was. But my job was to knock out a 105-millimeter anti-aircraft site, just close to the target. And we took off. And of course, as soon as you take off from, from the ship, they start picking you up on radar. So, they know where you are, and you can hear . . . did anybody ever give you Noisy's poem "Crickets"?

(1:04:40 – 1:04:40) Jessica Williams: I don't think so.

(1:04:41 – 1:10:26) Brian Walker: You've never seen "Crickets"? (laughs) Oh, I'll send it to you. But they had the ability to, to receive a transmitted radar signal and convert it to a sound. And then they'd put that sound in your headsets. So, when you took off, they would pick you up on their search radar; they had big radars going around in circles. And then they'd pick you up. And then, they would try to pinpoint you. They would try to figure out your altitude. And they had, what they call, you know, sort of, or, uh, range finders, height finders. And they would go like that, once they found ya on their search radar, then they'd switch over to their height finders and the radars would go like this (signaling with hand). And their search radars, you could hear

in your sets, headphones, “Blip, blip.” And then when they switched over to the height finders and you hear the “blip-blip, blip-blip” – you know, in your headsets. And then, once they got your height and they knew where you were coming from, then they’d search with their target radars. They’d try to lock onto you. And when they locked onto you, you got a solid sound in your headset. And they knew, you’d get a pretty good idea they’re getting ready to fire a missile at you, once you, once you heard that. So you go this sound in your headsets, and you’re starting to look for these missiles coming up. And, uh, so they knew you were coming. They knew a long way out, when you were coming. And the, the goal was to try to get to the target at 10,000 feet and, with as much air speed as you could possibly get – hopefully 300 knots would be the ideal. And you were heavy. And, but you, the flak suppressors were generally not as heavy as the bombers because they wanted you to be able to maneuver a little bit more. And the idea was to try to take out as much anti-aircraft sites with the flak suppressors, so the bombers could come in, heavier-loaded, without being shot at, at the target; or shot at, as much.

(1:06:43) So, when you’re 50 miles out or 60 miles out, they start tracking ya on radar. And they may fire a missile when you’re out over the sea. Maybe, knowing that they aren’t gonna hit you, but if you start to take any evasive maneuvers, you’re gonna lose a lot of your altitude. And when you lose your altitude, you become vulnerable to anti-aircraft sites. So they’ll start firing missiles a long way out, and start movin’ . . . by the time I’d gotten to the target in Haiphong, I was down to 1000 feet, just trying to, you know, avoid missiles. I’d see a missile here (points to right), I’d do my evasive turns. And, but I still had probably, 30, 40 miles to get back to the target; so I started climbing up for altitude. Well, when you climb for altitude, you also lose your air speed. So, by the time I got to, back up to 10,000 – I don’t think I even got back to 10,000 feet. But by the time I located my target, uh, south of Haiphong, I had dissipated an awful lot of air speed, and most of my altitude. So, I was just getting ready to roll in on this anti-aircraft site, when it opened up, and I could see it firing. And I got hit. And I knew I was hit, but I didn’t know how bad I was hit, or where I was hit. Well, when I got hit, flipped my airplane over, on, on my back and I pulled the nose down and when I rolled the airplane out, I’m, I’m pretty much on my diving . . . well, I’m gonna fix your ass. So I kept on going; I pickled my bombs and I hit the guy, and I headed for the water, is what you want to do. Well, when I got back over the water, I started looking over the airplane, I could see the airplane had been burning. I couldn’t see how much damage was done because I was goin’ so slow at the time I rolled into the target that my slats were out. I don’t know if you know what the slats are on an airplane, but, uh, the leading edge of the airplane, when you go slow enough, they automatically come out and change the shape of the air wing to give you, of the wing to give you more lift. At higher speeds, they kind of fold back in. So, when I was up, at the top of my bomb run, my slats were out. When they hit me, it came up through my bomb rack, knocked off

two of my bombs and went up in the area underneath my slats. So when I got back out over the water and I was going, doing 300 or 400 knots at that point, uh, I'd look out over my wings, I couldn't see where the smoke was coming from. But I knew it was coming from underneath my slats. And it was draining my fuel tanks, and it was burning. So, I couldn't see that until I got low-and-slow, back at the ship. And then I could see, you know, how bad it was, how bad I got hit. If I'd had been a little smarter, when I got hit, I'd have just headed for the water because (laughs), uh, going into a bomb run, pulling out, uh, you know, 6 G's at the bottom of a bomb run, with an airplane that's probably got some structural damage to it – wasn't the smartest thing to do. So . . . and then, when I got back to the ship, uh, parked on the Flight Deck, uh, all the ordnance men, the maintenance men, you know, come up and started puttin' fire extinguishers on the airplane – I thought, this musta been worse than I thought it was so . . . I thought about that for a long while, afterwards.

(1:10:26 – 1:10:26) Jessica Williams: Thought about what?

(1:10:27 – 1:10:42) Brian Walker: About what I did after I got hit. I mean, they gave me a Distinguished Flying Cross. I can tell you, there were no heroic thoughts going through my head at that time. I was mad. (laughs) I was! And I should have just let it go, and gone home.

(1:10:42 – 1:10:53) Jessica Williams: How did this experience affect your subsequent missions? What was it like to get back in the plane the next time?

(1:10:53 – 1:11:39) Brian Walker: (sighs) I, I don't think it made me any more cautious, uh, . . . than that, I, you know, I think if I had got in another situation where, if I would have been so slow over a target, uh, I may have made my delivery different. I, I shouldn't have been as slow, and as low as I was, but I didn't have any choice. I coulda just broken it off and gone home. If I'd a done that, then somebody else behind me mighta got hit, so . . . I, I, I don't think it changed me too much. I hope it didn't. Well, maybe it did. Maybe I got a little smarter after that.

(1:11:39 – 1:11:42) Jessica Williams: Well it sounds like it's a lot of, just reacting in the moment.

(1:11:42 – 1:11:56) Brian Walker: That's exactly what it is. That's exactly what it is. You don't get any time to think when you get, and all of the sudden you're upside down and your nose is goin' down towards the target to – here I am.

(1:11:56 – 1:11:58) Jessica Williams: Did you witness any of your squadronmates get hit?

(1:11:58 – 1:12:18) Brian Walker: Yes. Uh, I witnessed, uh, two guys go down, actually. That's, that was probably the toughest part of it was. Probably the worst day in my entire cruise was when Denny Key got shot down. Denny was a good friend of mine.

(1:12:18 – 1:12:21) Jessica Williams: Can you, were you in the air at that time? Did you see that happen?

(1:12:21 – 1:12:29) Brian Walker: Uh, no I wasn't in the air at the time. I was in the air when John McCain got shot down, but I didn't see it.

(1:12:29 – 1:12:35) Jessica Williams: What, um, tell me about, um, about how you learned about Denny getting shot down.

(1:12:35 – 1:13:32) Brian Walker: When we got back to the Ready Room, we would come back to debrief, you know, that, uh, you know, somebody saw him go down. Uh, Gene Teeter saw him go down. Gene was his, was his flight leader at the time, and knew he got out, which was the big thing. Did you see his chute? Did you see his chute? He says, "Yeah, I saw his chute." So, it's just hard to shake that sort of thing knowin' that he's, there's, he's gonna be spending the rest of the war, or however long it was, nobody knew how long it was gonna be at that time. Nobody hoped that it would be five years from that time, which it was, til he got out. But, uh, that was probably the worst experience of my whole tour over there, had the most impact on me. I mean, we lost other guys, but Denny was close to me.

(1:13:32 – 1:13:34) Jessica Williams: That was fairly close to the end of the . . .

(1:13:34 – 1:13:42) Brian Walker: That was in November. We finished up about, just weeks after that.

(1:13:42 – 1:13:50) Jessica Williams: From your, from your . . . were you prepared for what the North Vietnamese anti-aircraft defenses were?

(1:13:50 – 1:15:10) Brian Walker: No. In fact, in prior years . . . George Blosser had been on a cruise in 1966, on the Oriskany, and then was reassigned to our ship, or our squadron when they went on the Saratoga. So George had been over there in 1966, or maybe '65. And it wasn't that way, previous years. I mean, the North Vietnamese really ramped up the air defenses in 1967. That was probably the worst of the air war in North Vietnam. I mean, there were times when we had, the air defenses pounded down to nothing. I mean, they were no threat to us anymore. But they were smart enough to know that they wanted to negotiate so bad that they

would have 10-day stand downs. Let's go to the peace tables and talk. Well, when they went to the peace tables, the missiles just come pouring out of China; the anti-aircraft guns come pouring out of China. So, ten days later, when we go back to hit a target, it was right back at it again. Just, why they did that, I'll never understand. But they did.

(1:15:10 – 1:15:14) Jessica Williams: And at the time, you were aware that stand downs were . .

(1:15:14 – 1:15:40) Brian Walker: Oh, yeah. Sure. Sure. We knew, we knew what was goin' on. And we all knew it. Uh, and we, I mean we saw evidence of it. I mean, we, what, there would be times over there, where, I mean, you could fly across Vietnam without anybody firing a shot at you, much less a missile. But after stand down, they were locked and loaded. They were ready to go again, so . . . that's the way it was.

(1:15:40 – 1:15:54) Jessica Williams: Were there any, so because you were flying low, you could really see quite a lot on the ground. Any particularly noteworthy memories of things that you saw, while flying over North Vietnam?

(1:15:54 – 1:18:23) Brian Walker: Uh, I could tell ya one thing that could probably get me prosecuted . . . I was flying, uh, an, a flak suppression mission, again, into Hanoi. Except that this time, I had two Gatling guns – one under each wing. These things fired, like, 7000 rounds a minute, I don't know, some incredible amount of fire power. They were just a wicked weapon. And my job, I was using a lot of flak suppression run where I just scattered lead throughout the whole anti-aircraft area. And, as we were goin' in they started firing missiles at us again. And there was a navigation platform in Haiphong Harbor as the Red River came out of Hanoi Harbor, it was off limits. I mean, it was an international navigation platform that the ships used to, to use to navigate going up the, up the harbor, into Haiphong. And they had started firing missiles at us again. And I was flying with Snavely, and this was after I'd been hit the first time. And I had these two anti-aircraft, or these two Gatling guns under my wing, one under each wing. And I'm so low, that I look out at this navigation platform, and I see a guy standing there, firing at us, with either a rifle or an automatic weapon of some type. And this was supposed to be an, you know, a navigation platform. And I just made note of it, after we got back in, hit the target, I had enough ammo left in these two Gatling guns that, I was going to make a run on this guy comin' out. And I did. And there wasn't a lot left of it after I went past it. And we did hear about it, through the State Department, about four days later that they were tryin' to figure out who fired on that international platform. And nobody knew. (laughs) So, this is probably the first time I've ever told anybody that, but . . . that's, that's what you see when you're flyin' low.

(1:18:23 – 1:18:24) Jessica Williams: So it never came back to you?

(1:18:24 – 1:18:31) Brian Walker: Never came back to me. I think the statute of limitations is over by now (laughs), so I'm not worried about it.

(1:18:31 – 1:18:45) Jessica Williams: I would, I would hope so. Um, um, I realize that we've been talking generally about the attack mission of the A-4 and of the squadron. Um, can you describe more specifically, the kinds of ordnance that you typically carried?

(1:18:45 – 1:24:44) Brian Walker: Well, we, we didn't do any close air support, so we didn't drop any napalm. Uh, we didn't do much strafing, other than with the Gatling guns that we used for flak suppression. So, we normally carried either, we could carry, I believe our limit was like a 2000-pound bomb under each wing. Uh, or we could carry, maybe a, you know, six 250-pound bombs under each wing. Uh, but it was either bombs of various sizes, rockets, uh, we carried, uh, Zuni rockets, which were like a five-inch rocket. We had a pod of, I don't know how many were in a pod, maybe three or six. And we would put those on our bomb racks under each wing, and, uh, we used those quite often for flak suppression. And also, for missile suppression. Uh, the electronics warfare was just, they were startin' to develop at the time, but, uh, one of the weapons that we had was a . . . it was a shrike missile. And what a shrike had the ability to do, was fly down the radar signal that a surface-to-air missile was using for the missile to fly up. So they put this radar beam on your airplane, the one that locked on the airplane, and they'd fly this missile up this radar beam. Well, the shrike had the ability to pick up that radar beam and fly down it, into the site. So, that was one of the defenses that we used against the surface-to-air missiles. So, as soon as they saw that shrike coming, they'd shut off the radar, which was good, because they'd also couldn't navigate the surface-to-air missile. And, but the shrikes were very expensive and they wouldn't give us a lot of them. I mean, they'd give us three or four, at the most. So, we also figured out that if, uh, if we fired a Zuni missile, they couldn't tell the difference. And a Zuni was a pretty cheap rocket, compared to a shrike; and it had no navigational abilities whatsoever, it was just like a big Fourth of July rocket going down towards the . . . so we used that sometimes, as a defensive mechanism. So we used rockets. Uh, we had bombs. We had concussion bombs, which were very effective against flak sites. They were a bomb that would actually detonate at, at 1000 or 2000 feet of, of altitude. And the shock wave was so big, when it hit the ground, I mean, that anybody close to that shock wave, it might pop your eyeballs out or pop your eardrums out, or something. But it was effective in shutting down, uh, anti-aircraft sites. Uh, so the rockets, the Gatling guns, uh, various types of, of bombs. The only guided missile we had was the Bullpup and, uh, I flew a couple missions with a Bullpup. Uh, it wasn't real reliable. What it was, was – it was kinda dangerous to fly because in order to, to control a Bullpup, I'd put a Bullpup under, under my wing. And I was actually pretty good with them. I think Bernie's book describe, I sunk a target

one time with the Bullpup; and got the skipper all upset. But, uh, you would drop this Bullpup, you'd roll into like a 30- or 40-degree dive. And you'd drop this Bullpup and it would ignite; and then you had a little joystick here that you flew this thing into the target with. At the same time, you had to fly with the other hand, you had to fly your airplane, and you couldn't do a lot of maneuvering to keep away from the anti-aircraft sites, you had to, you know, stay locked on to that, 'cause all you can see was the tail of that Bullpup missile, the fireball. And then you control that, into your target. And, uh, one mission I went on – I was a JG at the time, a Junior Officer. But I had a reputation of being very good with the Bullpup. They wanted to knock out this hydroelectric station down one of the rivers, and it was way in-country, in North Vietnam.

(1:23:15) So they assigned me to go in there with the Bullpup. And generally, you go in with a, with a flight of two airplanes. And for some reason, on this particular target, they sent four of us. But the other three guys are all senior lieutenant commanders, and I think what they were thinking about was, "Well, we'll send these guys in and maybe get them their Distinguished Flying Cross, if you can knock out that hydroelectric plant." But I was the only one who had a weapon. So, as I located the target, I rolled in. I dropped the Bullpup and, like I say, it was generally, they were not real reliable. It never came up, it never . . . either it never ignited or the control, they weren't readin' my controls, so once I dropped it, I never saw it again. So I'm in my 30-degree run. I realized that finally, I'm not going to be able to do anything with this, so I broke off my run and went back to the ship, and I'll ask these other guys, you know, where the rocket went? Well, I got back to the ship and I asked them where the rocket went, and – you know, I don't know, I never saw any rocket, you know, well, it means that these guys were hangin' out about five miles back, while I'm in my bomb run out there. (laughs) You know, just kinda hangin' it out, so, uh, that was my Bullpup. That was the only, I fired several Bullpups in practice; that was the only one I fired in combat, and wasn't real successful, so . . .

(1:24:44 – 1:24:46) Jessica Williams: Oh, well, and no decorations for those guys?

(1:24:46 – 1:24:49) Brian Walker: No decorations for any of us, no.

(1:24:49 – 1:25:07) Jessica Williams: Um, the weapons in Haiphong made me think – one of the things that often gets discussed with the Vietnam War, is the rules of engagement and what, um, what you were allowed to, you or the military was allowed to target or not. Um, how aware were all of you, of this, is this . . . ?

(1:25:07 – 1:26:30) Brian Walker: Well, you were made very much aware. I mean, you were not to hit, uh, an unassigned target, uh, and the targets were all assigned by Bob McNamara and Lyndon Johnson out of the White House. It was ridiculous. I mean, it was really ridiculous. I

mean, our targets of opportunities were trucks. You couldn't find the truck. I mean, they were smart enough not to run the trucks during the daytime and the convoys at night. So, uh, their rules of engagement, well especially the ones about, we couldn't even, we weren't even supposed to attack anti-aircraft sites, or surface-to-air sites, unless they were firing at us. Well, now, the rules of engagement may not have always been followed. I mean, if I could find an active surface-to-air missile site, and it's not my target, I'm not gonna, break the rules of enga, I'm not gonna worry about the rules of engagement. But, uh, that was, uh, that was one of the real negatives about the war, that, uh, you know, they were, I think they were so afraid of bringing the Chinese into the war, that they didn't wanna upset 'em. Cost us a lot of pilots, and a lot of airplanes.

(1:26:30 – 1:26:35) Jessica Williams: At the time, did you think that your missions were effective?

(1:26:35 – 1:28:15) Brian Walker: Uh, yes and no. Some of the big ones were. The road reccies weren't. Uh, we tried to do night missions for a long time, for a couple of weeks – that was just ridiculous. I mean, we had no capabilities at night. Our night missions considered, two of us taking off from the ship. One of us with several flares, parachute flares. The other one with some bombs or whatever, you know, rockets, whatever. The idea was that whoever had the flares would fly three, four miles up in front of the other guys – there's no lights over the country at the time. A lot of times, no horizon. You'd drop a flare and then you'd try to find something underneath it. Well, I mean, it was just ridiculous, I mean, but that was our, that was our sole night capability. Now, other airplanes, the A-6s, did have night capabilities. We didn't. I mean we didn't have any kind of radar that we could find targets of opportunity on. So, we tried that for, couple of weeks, three or four weeks, I guess, and it got to be so stressful. You know, goin' over North Vietnam at night, you know, with no lights. And very little ordnance, no assigned targets, and then have to come back to the ship at night, and recover on the ship that I think it finally got through to 'em that, uh, it was not only ineffective, it was dangerous. So we quit doin' it, which was one of the happy, happy days in my life. (smiles)

(1:28:15 – 1:28:26) Jessica Williams: I'm sure. Um, let's see, are there any other recollections you have about combat missions, before we move on to other, other topics?

(1:28:26 – 1:30:44) Brian Walker: Oh, I remem, I remember the day that The Frog got hit – Commander Wigent. I was, uh, he and I were going on a, probably one of the only times that he and I flew together as a two-plane . . . but we were going up into the panhandle to do some reconnaissance. And, uh, we didn't have sophisticated cameras. Our reconnaissance flights were, they gave us a Topcon 35-millimeter camera. We were supposed to fly into the area, lean

over, take some pictures. Well, he and I were going up to do that and, uh, as we approached the beach up there I noticed that, both of us jinkin' all the time, movin' around (moves arms), so they couldn't track us. And I'm behind him. And I see, he started, you know, kind of levelin' his wings and rolled up to take some pictures of the harbor up there, to see if there were any ships in it. And I'm saying to myself, "You better keep movin', Skipper, you better keep movin'." And all of the sudden, I saw this 105-millimeter site open up, and I looked up and all I saw was a fireball. I mean, just, this huge fireball. And I thought, "He's done, he's gone." And so I started (laughs), kept on moving to see if I could see a chute or anything, and I got up there and when the smoke cleared, (gestures with arms) here he comes out of this fireball, just goin' (moves arms) like this. (laughs) As fast as he could move. I couldn't believe the airplane was still intact. And I finally caught up to him, and what had happened – they'd hit him, 105-millimeter shell had hit the back part of his fuel tank that was hangin' out from underneath his wings. And blew the end of it off, and ignited that huge fireball, as the fuel come out of that tank. (laughs) And after I got over the excitement of seeing all this fire, I finally flew up beside him and saw his tank had been blown apart, and I knew what had happened at that point. But, when we got back to the ship, and counted the holes in that airplane. I mean, it was like 70-some, 80-some holes (laughs) they found in that airplane; and it was flyin' fine. But, uh, that was, that was an impressive sight to see that fireball, to see him come flying out of the fireball.

(1:30:44 – 1:30:45) Jessica Williams: Wow, that's amazing.

(1:30:45 – 1:30:52) Brian Walker: It was amazing. And also, subject of a lot of jokes. (laughs)

(1:30:52 – 1:30:53) Jessica Williams: Now you can laugh about it right.

(1:30:53 – 1:30:53) Brian Walker: Yeah, that's right.

(1:30:54 – 1:31:05) Jessica Williams: Um, I was gonna to move on to a few other, um, topics but I'm gonna just turn quickly and ask Eric if there's anything else about combat that you would like to know?

(1:31:05 – 1:31:06) Eric Boehm: No, he's covered it.

(1:31:07 – 1:31:23) Jessica Williams: Okay, cool. Um, so one of the, one of the things about being on a Navy ship in Vietnam, is that you had opportunities to visit ports of call, um, to get off the line. I'm wondering if you have any, um, memories about favorite places or stories associated with that?

(1:31:23 – 1:32:38) Brian Walker: Well, I think Japan was always one of my favorite places. Uh, we, we would, we started in the Philippines and I think we visited the Philippines maybe twice after that. We went once to Hong Kong. Once to, uh, or twice to Japan, I believe. We were in Japan twice. And, uh, yeah, that was, that was part of joining the Navy and seeing-the-world-type thing for me. I mean, I think as a kid, uh, you know, I used to, as a very small kid, they had these what they call fat books. And you'd sit there and you'd thumb these pages and they were Bugs Bunny-type, and the characters would move as you fanned the pages on these fat books. I used to remember reading those, as a very small boy, uh, about Bugs Bunny goin' to Tibet and places like this. And, you know, I always had kind of a, kind of a dream with seeing places like that, and seeing, uh, different parts of the world – especially the Orient and, uh, yeah, that was, that was part of being in the Navy. That was a big, that was important to me.

(1:32:38 – 1:32:42) Jessica Williams: Were there any sights that made a particular impression on you?

(1:32:42 – 1:37:45) Brian Walker: Uh, I, yes, several. Uh, the first time we went to Hong Kong, uh, and seeing, uh, the, the cardboard boxes that their refugees lived, as they tried to stream out of, tried to get out of China. Uh, in fact I think, uh, they showed a lot of that in, uh, the William Holden movie – what was the name of that movie? Uh, (thinks), can't think of it now. But, uh, they showed, you know, the refugees, the poverty and, uh, that you saw. And the same was true in the Philippines. Uh, just tremendous poverty, you know, I'd never seen that anywhere, uh, in the world and much less, I'd never seen it in the United States, much less anywhere else in the world. But I liked the people in Japan. Japan was just kind of a neat, you know, the people were all so friendly and so outgoing and so honest. I actually had my wrist, my watch stolen off my wrist, walking across the bridge in the Philippines by a little kid. Fortunately, somebody walking behind me caught him, you know, reached down and grabbed the kid, told 'em, "Give him his watch back." But, I mean, the Philippines was a whole different world than that. But the Philippines was interesting. When we got away from the cities, uh, beautiful country, uh, I think VanLiere and I took a, took a kayak trip or a boat trip in these cutout boats, uh, that they paddled us up to, see some, Pagsanjan Falls, I think, up in the Philippines. But it was just a beautiful country. I enjoyed flying around the Philippines. Uh, we went on survival in the Philippines when we first got there; had to do, we had to do jungle survival training. And what they did is, they gave us about two weeks [Brian Walker meant to say, "two days"] in the classroom and then they sent us out into the jungle with the native Filipinos, which they called Negritos. And these were guys that were about that tall (gestures with hands), and they wore loincloths. And they lived in the jungle in tribes. And they loved Americans. They remembered World War II and they hated the Japanese. And they spoke very little English. But they always put us, took about four of us, and they sent us out into the jungle

to learn how to survive from these guys. Well, if they'd have figured out some way to dehydrate one of these guys and stick him in a sack, so you could just add water if you went down in Vietnam – these guys were just, they were incredible. I mean, I probably lived better out in the jungle with this guy takin' care of me, than I would have in a hotel in Manila.

(1:35:28) But they didn't speak very much English, but I think we were in the jungle for four days with these guys, show you how to get water out of a vine, show you how to catch a fish out of a stream, show you how to cook rice in a bamboo section. But the last night we were in the jungle, uh, I woke up after, about after, hour, a couple hours after I went to sleep. And we always were around, probably some sort of campfire, in a campsite. And then, I noticed this guy was gone. This Negrito, he was, he was just gone. I thought, "Man, I have no idea how to get out of where I am now, I don't know where the base is. I don't know where anything is." So I laid about half the night, you know, trying to figure out how I was going to get out of the jungle. I thought, this guy just probably decided to leave. Well, next morning I, I woke up, and here he is, sittin' by the fire, you know, and everything. And I couldn't have asked him where he was because he didn't speak that good English. But he led us out of the jungle. About noon that day, uh, we stopped, comin' down out of the, off the mountain, there's a pool, stream, a big – well, almost like a pool that dammed up in the jungle. And all of the sudden, this guy takes off his clothes and dives into this pool. And he comes out of this pool and he's got a six-pack of beer (laughs), and I thought, "Where in the heck did he get that beer?" Well, the Navy paid these guys, like, 20 dollars to take us out in the jungle. They had absolutely no use for the money 'cause they didn't live in the, on the base. But every, you know I found out what happened, every night, the last night, these guys would take that money that the Navy gave them; they'd run all the way into the base, which was probably seven or eight miles. Get beer, and they'd put them in these mountain streams so, the next day, they would pull them and we'd have some cool beer, if it wasn't cold, anyhow. But, uh, that was, that was my experience (laughs) with jungle survival training in the Philippines. These guys were incredible.

(1:37:45 – 1:37:45) Jessica Williams: That's great.

(1:37:46 – 1:38:40) Brian Walker: They'd make 'em, when they brought 'em onto the base, they'd make them wear khakis. And, as soon as, they'd put on, and then they'd introduce us in the classroom. And as soon as we got in the jungle, off came the khakis. (laughs) These guys just weren't used to livin' that way. But, uh, they remembered the atrocities the Japanese had caused in the Philippines during World War II, and if you even say the word "Jap," you know, they were spittin' and jumpin' up and down. They just, they didn't like Japanese. I said to the guy that, you know, we're flying around these mountains a lot. I said, "What happened if I got to eject and I go down in the mountains in the Philippines?" He says, "If you're alive, you'll be

well-taken care of and brought back to the base.” He says, “If you’re dead, they’ll take the gold out of your teeth and whatever you’re carrying in your pockets, and they’ll leave you there.” So (laughs), I thought, “Fair enough.”

(1:38:40 – 1:38:54) Jessica Williams: Wow, thanks. I hadn’t heard the survival training story. That’s great. So through all of this, through, visiting ports, being on the line, everything else – were you in frequent letter contact with your wife back home?

(1:38:54 – 1:41:41) Brian Walker: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I, there were a couple of incidents on the ship that were very impressive to me. Uh, one was Joe Dimaggio and Pete Rose comin’ in on the USA tour. And the thing that was impressive about that was, is, Joe Dimaggio at the time, was not looking for any publicity. He had gone through the thing with Marilyn Monroe. And, uh, she had died. And they asked us before they come onto the ship, you know, not to mention that to him. And, Joe Dimaggio spent a lot of time in our Ready Room. And I really, I mean, I got to, felt like I got to know him pretty well. He was the easiest guy in the world to talk to. I remember one day, when he was on the ship, that I had a early, one of the first flights out in the morning. Just gettin’ light. And I looked up in the Vulture’s Row, up in the catwalk and – Joe Dimaggio’s standin’ there. I went out on my mission, I came back and I had another one about two o’clock in the afternoon – he’s still up there. I had the last tanker flight, to fly at night. So I come back, it was dark out. He’s just comin’ down off there. And finally, when I got down to the Ready Room, he’s . . . in the meantime, I’d go back and sleep a couple hours or somethin’. And I said, “You know, you were there when I left. I took off at seven o’clock this morning. You were there all day long.” I says, “Don’t you ever sleep?” And he said, “When I played ball,” he said, “If I didn’t get eight hours of sleep at night,” he said, “I couldn’t, I wasn’t much good.” He says, “But I only sleep three, four hours a night now.” And, uh, he said, “Besides that,” he says, “this is the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen in my life.” And he would just spend hours and hours watching Flight Deck operations up in the, up in the . . . and I also, you know, why did he come over there? I mean, he didn’t, a lot of people come over there for the publicity. A lot of the young entertainers and things. But, uh, the only people that took pictures of them were us, you know, when we were there. And, uh, he just thought he wanted to come over and help. And, yeah, I wrote a lot of letters to my wife. We had, uh, a Miss USA troop come aboard for a week or so, and that was pretty nice. But one of the, I think, Miss Wisconsin that year was a runner-up, and she came. And she made a point of looking up the Wisconsin kids that were on the ship. And then, when she got back to Wisconsin, she called my wife and told her that she had talked to me and I was doing good. And so, that was impressive. I liked that.

(1:41:41 – 1:41:41) Jessica Williams: That’s amazing, actually.

(1:41:42 – 1:41:42) Brian Walker: Yeah.

(1:41:42 – 1:41:43) Jessica Williams: Taking the extra step to . . .

(1:41:44 – 1:41:44) Brian Walker: Yeah, that's right. Sure.

(1:41:45 – 1:41:46) Jessica Williams: . . . make contact with your wife. Um, did you save your correspondence with your wife?

(1:41:50 – 1:42:51) Brian Walker: (sighs) I think she's got most of the correspondence. Uh, we also used to do cassette tapes. I don't know if we did a lot of those in Vietnam. We did a lot of 'em on the next cruise, on the Forrestal. But I think we did do some of that, yeah. I would try not to write too much about, you know, to make her worried. I didn't want to, I did tell her that Denny Key had gotten shot down, and we thought he was captured. And, uh, but I didn't, we didn't talk too much about, you know, what was going on. We'd, we'd tell her what we did in port and what we saw and where we were goin'. But, uh, we would get mail, maybe, once a week or so. And, of course, that was the highlight, you know, hearin' from home, and getting our letters out. Not like today where you can get on the Internet and (laughs), visit with each other. FaceTime.

(1:42:51 – 1:43:02) Jessica Williams: That's why I asked the question. I think, as time moves forward, especially for our younger visitors – the concept of sending a letter is completely, you know, foreign.

(1:43:02 – 1:43:03) Brian Walker: Sure, yeah, that's right.

(1:43:03 – 1:43:09) Jessica Williams: And the time, distance between when somebody communicates with you, and when you actually receive that communication.

(1:43:09 – 1:43:09) Brian Walker: Yeah.

(1:43:09 – 1:43:18) Jessica Williams: We appreciate letters because it means that's something tangible that lives in the collection, for us. For future curators that have to deal with email and . . .

(1:43:18 – 1:43:23) Brian Walker: Yeah, I don't know if, I, I don't know if she's got her le, I think she does.

(1:43:24 – 1:43:24) Jessica Williams: Have to inquire.

(1:43:24 – 1:43:24) Brian Walker: Yeah, I'll ask her.

(1:43:25 – 1:43:38) Jessica Williams: Um, so tell me about, um, about your homecoming back to the States, after your time on board Intrepid.

(1:43:38 – 1:46:34) Brian Walker: Well, we flew out on a commercial airliner from Manila, after the ship had rounded Cape Horn. And we flew from Manila to Tokyo. I believe we landed in Seattle. I flew from there, and was able to get off that plane, uh, in Seattle. Uh, and from there, I caught a plane to Milwaukee. And my wife had picked me up at the airport. Uh, we didn't go home right away; we stayed in a motel (laughs) the first night. But, uh, I had asked her, uh, in a letter, uh, before that – to see if she couldn't find a resort or someplace in northern Wisconsin that stayed open in the wintertime, which is rare; uh, so we could just get away and I could try to get my head on straight. Uh, and she did. And, uh, we found a place, uh, very near the northernmost point in Wisconsin – snow and cold, and got a cabin, that we could build a fireplace in. Took a week to, I say, get my head on straight and get a new perspective on things. And, uh, that was very important. It was for me, and I think it was for her. Uh, the odd thing about that was is, we still have friends up in northern Wisconsin. And last summer, we were up in Eagle River, Wisconsin and these friends do cross-country skiing and snowmobiling, and they says, "Yeah, we found this great place where we go cross-country skiin'. It's called the Afterglow Resort." I says, (laughs), I says, "You're kidding me! That place is still around!" And I told them that's where we had gone in the December before Christmas – when we got back from Vietnam in 1967. Well, he says, "Well, let's go out there." And I said, "Well, drive out there and see if I could recognize any place." But I had several pictures of 'em; in fact, they may have been in the slides that I had. And, yeah, they might have been. But I mean, it was, you couldn't hardly get out of the cabin there was so much snow and everything – kind of like what Boston's got now. But, uh, we hiked and took rides and just kinda got to know each other again. But the resort was still there. The son of the place, of the man who was running it when we were there, owns it now. We got to look in the same cabin that we were in. This is like, 45, 46 years after we'd been there – so that's what we did when we got back.

(1:46:34 – 1:46:41) Jessica Williams: Sounds like a nice way to take a pause and reintegrate back into your relationship . . .

(1:46:41 – 1:47:09) Brian Walker: Well, not only that. It's just, your attitude about things, you know, uh, I mean, you come from a combat situation where it's combat every day, you know, back into the routine of what most people see every day is a whole lot different. So you gotta

kinda bring yourself down a little bit. And, you know, a lot of guys have a difficult time making that adjustment. I don't think I did, but I made an effort to do it.

(1:47:09 – 1:47:15) Jessica Williams: Did you describe much of your experience to your wife?

(1:47:15 – 1:47:58) Brian Walker: No. Not too much, I don't think. I just never talked a lot about it, after that. Uh, never talked to my kids about it. But, maybe 15 years ago, we were in a Rotary, I was in a Rotary Club in Wisconsin and, uh, another guy that had been an Army veteran was asking guys if they would, wanted to speak to the Rotary Club about their experience in Vietnam. And I said, "You know, I spent 30-somethin' years tryin' to forget about my experience in Vietnam. I don't want to have to try that, start that over again." So, I declined.

(1:47:58 – 1:48:07) Jessica Williams: Were you, um, upon your return, how were you, did you experience any positive or negative treatment from just, other people around?

(1:48:07 – 1:51:02) Brian Walker: Well, it was then when I started realizing that there was a lot of opposition to the war over there. Uh, I think the first experience I had was, a friend of my wife's father, uh, you know, would talk to me a little about it. And he said, "Well, I think it's a waste of time; we shouldn't be over there, anyhow." And I looked at him, like I thought, "You don't know." And then, you know, when I first got, when I got out of the . . . I made my next cruise on the Forrestal. And after I got back from the Forrestal, I got out of the service. I went to work in Madison, Wisconsin – at a bank. And Madison was a hotbed of anti-war protest at that time. I got out in '69. Uh, a lot of riots on campus and I was working right in the middle of that. And that was very difficult for me. I had, I worked in a bank and we hired students part-time, to work in our drive-up windows after the banks were closed. And I had this one girl that was a student, and she was an anti-war protester. And she was a nice kid, you know, she just, she just didn't have a clue. And one night I was workin' there, and we got talkin' a little bit and she knew I was a veteran. And I said, "Do you know where Vietnam is?" And she says, "Yeah, I think it's right next to France." (laughs) I just kinda, thought, you know, that, you know . . . I understand that, you know, it was controversial. You could debate forever whether you oughta be there or not. But I think the thing that hurt me the most was the, . . . you know I was just a military guy, you know? I wasn't the guy that decided we should go to war, but, uh, you know, they took it out on, you know, veterans. They took it out, uh . . . , you know, I'll never forgive Jane Fonda. Never. That's all there is to it. Uh, there were a lot of people like her. And, uh, you know the whole attitude of the country changed because of that, because of the war. Uh, it was a difficult time for me. We lived in Madison for seven years. And I think a lot of my reason for moving from Madison was just because I didn't like that liberal attitude that pervaded the

University town, at the time. So, I struggled with it. I don't think I always controlled it. Uh, I know a lot of guys didn't. But I controlled it a lot of times, just by avoiding it.

(1:51:02 – 1:51:10) Jessica Williams: Do you, um, do you remember your feelings on learning about the fall of Saigon?

(1:51:10 – 1:52:17) Brian Walker: Uh, no. The mo, probably, probably the most emotional time that I had was when the POWs came back in 1972. I was in Madison at the time. And I was working at a bank. And I knew that that was gonna be televised. So I went home from work that day, and I sat in front of the TV all by myself – I cried like a baby when I saw those guys come off the plane. (gets emotional) Uh, that to me, was the end of the war, uh, to see those guys came home. There was not a day in my life that I didn't think about the POWs over there – all that time. And, uh, like I said, probably, the night that we spent listening to Denny Key talk about his experiences over there, was when somebody lifted the monkey off my back. So . . .

(1:52:17 – 1:52:37) Jessica Williams: You are now sitting, decades past all of, all of this . . . and thank you, um, you know, I'll probably be saying thank you many times to you for running through all of, all of, all of this. So now, when you think back, what do you think now – when you think back about your service? About, about your experiences, about the war?

(1:52:37 – 1:53:41) Brian Walker: Well, I don't know, I mean given the situation at the time, I don't think I'd have done anything differently. Uh, you know, I knew what the military was all about. You know I knew what, uh, if you join the military, you're liable to fight in the war. I mighta looked differently about the way that I would have done it. I might have been more cons, you're a young man. I'm 26 years old. I mean, I get mad, you know, if you had things that I think about, uh – you know, I couldn't do it today. Uh, so, to go back and say – would I have done anything differently, or what are my experience . . . I look at it a lot different now, than I did when I was 26 years old. I would not want my kids or my grandkids, you know, to fight a war of any kind. But they will, so, I hope they do it well.

(1:53:41 – 1:53:56) Jessica Williams: We're sitting here, it's really, um, a chance, that Intrepid is still here, you consider the fate of so many ships in the Navy. Um, what does it mean to you that Intrepid is here? And what do you hope our visitors get out of their visit?

(1:53:56 – 1:56:30) Brian Walker: It means a lot to me that they, they, this survived. Uh, for years after I first heard about it, I didn't even know they had made it a Museum. Uh, I was at work one day and I got a call from my daughter, who was working for Northwestern Mutual at the time, and she says, "Guess where I am?" I said, "I have no idea where you are." I knew she

was traveling a lot at the time. She says, "I am standing on the Intrepid." I says, "What?" She says, "Yeah I'm in New York Harbor, standing on the Intrepid." And I said, "You're kiddin' me!" 'Cause I didn't even know they'd made it into a Museum at the time. So, she bought, I think, uh, she bought a little sailor hat, and a couple souvenirs. And, uh, but when we came back here three years ago, it was, it was an emotional experience. I, uh, I've always taken a great deal of pride about serving on the Intrepid. Intrepid was just a, was a fantastic ship. Did what it was supposed to do. I served on the Forrestal, which they just hauled into the scrapyard. We used to call it the "USS Zippo," because it was on fire every time you turned around. I mean, it was, I mean, it was hard to sleep at night on that ship – you know, what was going on. But the Intrepid was, was, I mean, it was my idea of the way that a military operation ought to have been run. It was, it was good. I'm glad they did it. Glad they kept it. I was a critic of it at first, because my idea of what it was, when I was on it, was not what they did with it when I first, you know, realized that all the planes they had on the Flight Deck, very of 'em were Navy planes. Uh, so I was, I was a vocal critic cause it really isn't the Intrepid, it's a museum. And, uh, you know, I also came to understand that, you know, as just trying to restore it to what it was would not have worked. I mean, what you've got here now is something to be really proud of. I've gone on the Yorktown in Charleston. They pretty well kept that as what it is, but one of these days that thing's just gonna crumble into the sea (laughs). I mean, it's in tough shape. So, I'm a fan.

(1:56:30 – 1:56:33) Jessica Williams: Thank you. Yeah it's no small feat to keep these . . .

(1:56:33 – 1:56:35) Brian Walker: No, no.

(1:56:35 – 1:56:45) Jessica Williams: . . . things up. And certainly, the, wanting to see it back how it was, is something that many people who've served on the ship, wish. And it's always a balance of . . .

(1:56:45 – 1:56:45) Brian Walker: Sure.

(1:56:46 – 1:56:52) Jessica Williams: . . . what's the right way to reach the public. And, of course, what the ship was is different for each moment in time.

(1:56:52 – 1:56:52) Brian Walker: That's right.

(1:56:53 – 1:57:09) Jessica Williams: So, I . . . do you have any questions? Is there anything that I didn't ask, or anything that comes to mind that you want to, that you want to say at any, it doesn't have to be in chronological order. Anything that, anything we skipped?

(1:57:09 – 1:59:01) Brian Walker: No, I don't think so. I, you know, I've talked to Bernie about, you know, some of the feelings that I have, about the book. Not everybody was real happy with Bernie's book, but when somebody asked me about it, I'd say, "Hey, I didn't write the book." I may have lived some of it, uh – a lot of guys think he, think his approach to describing the leadership, uh, was a little overboard. I tend to agree with that, but I don't disagree with everything that he said, or what he was trying to, trying to do with it. Uh, I'm glad he wrote it. Uh, for one thing, uh, it's given my kids some insight, you know, into what it was like – because they didn't get it from me. Uh, so, I, I appreciate that he did that. The "Triple Sticks" log, I had that for years and years, and never thought anything of it. And, uh, I don't know however, I wound up with it. I never really considered it belonged to me; I always considered more, it belonged to VanLiere than anybody. But I'd always hoped, you know, that somebody would take it and write something about it – either a novel or a book or some kinda memoir. But, uh, so when Bernie decided to do it, I was, I was really glad that he did it. And I'm also very glad that it's here and, you know, not sitting in somebody's drawer someplace, uh, so when we all die that some kid will throw it away and say, "What's this?" And, uh, because it kinda describes . . . and it's a good story. There's a story in it; somebody just had to bring it out. So I'm glad Bernie did that.

(1:59:01 – 1:59:08) Jessica Williams: So are we. It makes that, as you say, so much more accessible; and I can imagine it's very meaningful for all of you and your families. I hadn't really thought about it in that, in those terms.

(1:59:08 – 1:59:08) Brian Walker: Sure, yeah.

(1:59:09 – 1:59:29) Jessica Williams: And I can tell you that we are beyond, honored, to have the original here. I mean, I can, it's, in the time I've been here, it's one of the best things that's come through the door, and something that we reference all the time. And just, we have other diaries in the collection, but the fact that there are multiple people represented in there, make it really unique.

(1:59:29 – 1:59:49) Brian Walker: Yeah, and everybody agreed. At first, I think, I thought Jim had thoughts about keeping it after I gave it to him. And I had a hard time gettin' it back. But I know, I talked to BF before he died, you know, about bringing it here. And I think we all, we all agreed – this is where it belonged. So, I'm glad you got it.

(1:59:49 – 2:00:00) Jessica Williams: Great. Good, well, I think, I mean, we've covered a lot. Usually what we do, um, for the very last moment for the interview is you don't have to do

anything but sit there, and my esteemed camera guy will just get a brief close-up of your face, you don't have to do anything.

(2:00:00 – 2:00:06) Brian Walker: My wife kept reminding me – a lot of times I talk, I've got my hand in my mouth. And so, she says, "Be sure, don't put your hand over your mouth."

(2:00:06 – 2:00:20) Jessica Williams: Yeah, it's always fun to interview aviators because you guys have the best hand gestures for things, so we always need to keep in mind, um, enough space for your arm, arm motions.

(2:00:20 – 2:00:25) Brian Walker: They say, if you cut a fighter pilot's hands off, he won't be able to say a word. (laughs)

(2:00:26 – 2:00:27) Jessica Williams: Yeah, it's totally true.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]