

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH DONALD N. EDMANDS JR.

FOR THE  
VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WAR AND SOCIETY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

INTERVIEWED BY  
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AND  
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TINKER: Okay, this begins an interview with Donald N. Edmands Jr. on February the 28<sup>th</sup> 2012, and we're at the Center for the Study of War and Society offices and my name is Cynthia Tinker, and I'm the project coordinator here. Also joining us on the interview today is ...

HESSLER: Lee Hessler.

TINKER: And Lee's one of our interns this semester, and he's the one that picked your file from our many files, our poor backlog of files of veterans to interview.

EDMANDS: Okay.

TINKER: But like I said before, you know, we'll start out just—maybe you can tell us about your family background. You said you were born in Knoxville?

EDMANDS: Yeah. Well, I can run—tell me if I'm being, saying too much or too little.

TINKER: Oh you can start with your parents, if you want to tell us about your parents ...

EDMANDS: Okay well—no I'll just start, and you tell me where to speed it up or slow it down. That's what I meant. (Laughter) [I was] born in Knoxville. My father was in the Army Air Corps, and he was stationed at Hill Air Force Base in Salt Lake [Utah]. My mother, she was pregnant with me and went out to visit him, and that's a long train ride as you can imagine. And on the way back coming through Kentucky, she went into labor. She was early. I was a preemie. She went into early labor, stopped in Harlan, Kentucky and [they] wanted to put her off the train, and she says, "Excuse my language, hell no. I'm not having any kid born in Harlan, Kentucky. Get this train to Knoxville." (Laughter) So, they came on to Knoxville, met her at the train in an ambulance, and ran up to Fort Sanders [Medical Center] and I was born thirty minutes later. So I'm originally from Knoxville.

TINKER: By your mother's determination. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Yes. And as I said, my father was in the Army Air Corps. After World War II he got in the [National] Guard here in Knoxville, down on Sutherland [Avenue], and then he ended up in the Air Guard out of McGhee Tyson [Air National Guard Base] when they started that unit. And, they were called up to active duty. We went to Massachusetts, Buzzard Bay, and he went to Otis Air Force Base—called up for active duty. And, a little story in here, and if you don't want it tell me no. The Adjutant ... he was guardsman on active duty, and the Adjutant General of Tennessee promised him a job when he came back to Knoxville. So when he got off active duty, he came back to Knoxville, called up and said, "I'm ready for the job." The Adjutant General says, "I'm sorry, the governor that I worked for lost the election. I'm out, and I can't give you the job." So my father, long story short, ended up going on active duty in the Air Force. Of course that was during Korean War, and they were wanting people.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: So he went on active duty in the Air Force, and stayed and made a career.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: So we went from here to France. To Chaumont Air Force Base, France. Spent two-plus years there. Came back to Valdosta, he was at Moody Air Force Base, Valdosta, Georgia. And then in '61 when I was a sophomore in high school, we moved to Okinawa. Which is now back with Japan. Naha, Okinawa ...

TINKER: Oh wow. Now how old were you when you all went to France for two years?

EDMANDS: When I—we went to France, we went in '53. So I'd been like nine. And I was like, I think I turned eleven right when we came back.

TINKER: Yeah, what base?

EDMANDS: Chaumont Air Force Base.

TINKER: That was the name of the Air Force base?

EDMANDS: Yes, and of course we gave it back to the French, and it's now a French Air Force base.

TINKER: Wow.

EDMANDS: My parents went and visited it a number of years ago.

TINKER: Oh really?

EDMANDS: Yeah, I went over there and talked the French into letting them go on base and visit it. But when we went to Chaumont there was nothing there. There was nothing, but tents and a metal prefab runway. It was built while we were there, it was a brand new base. There was no provisions for dependents. So ...

TINKER: I was gonna say, did you live on base, or—I guess you didn't.

EDMANDS: ... the military married guys got together and they rented a hotel about forty miles or kilometers away from the base in Vauxbons, France. So, we all—this whole hotel was military dependents. And they ran the menu, they'd buy the food in the commissary and bring it to the hotel, and the hotel cook would cook it. We'd all go down, it was like mess hall. We'd go down there and all of us in the dining room would eat the same thing.

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: ... but uh, did that. There was no provision for schools. They rented a French night club. And I can remember going to grade school and daydreaming, and watching that big silver ball up in the ceiling, with a bar at the end of the room.

TINKER: Well, who was doing the teaching?

EDMANDS: The mothers. Some of the mothers had teaching experience.

TINKER: Oh, home school in a way.

EDMANDS: Yeah they got books, and they divided the rooms up with like plywood or something. You'd like throw something over in the other class, but we were divided up and went to school. And kind of a unique thing, when I got out of class, we went out and played in bombed out buildings.

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: You know, France was not recovered from World War II. So, I can remember one of our favorites, we'd go up and up and up in this staircase, and there's nothing. You'd just like step off on the fourth or fifth floor, and the building's gone.

TINKER: That's a real adventure for a kid.

EDMANDS: Well yeah, absolutely it was. ... And eventually, we like moved three times. We lived in two French chateaus. I don't know why my parents moved so much, but we lived in two huge French chateaus. The last one had four American families, and the French family [living] in it. And by the way, a couple of years ago I went back to that chateau and visited with them. Met the people that live there now.

TINKER: How nice.

EDMANDS: Fifty years later, and they were just tickled to death. A German family owns it.

TINKER: I bet.

EDMANDS: Took us all through the—they asked me questions. We went in this one room, and they say, "You know there's piping in here for plumbing, do you have any idea what this room was?" I say, "Yeah, it was our kitchen!" (Laughter) Things like that, but, uh, went back to there.

TINKER: That's nice. Did y'all learn to speak some French while you were there?

EDMANDS: Well, I played with French kids, so I knew enough to converse and get along and ... you know, play with the kids. But, I never—I wouldn't say that I was ever a linguist. But my sister now, they took the three kids that weren't old enough for first grade—and my sisters, one of them, and they went to the one-room French school house in a little village. [They] had their little satchels, and every day they'd go off to school.

TINKER: So she's really learning French.

EDMANDS: Yeah, she actually went to school. [She] went to French school, yeah.

TINKER: Wow.

EDMANDS: Yeah, and let me see. Then we finally moved on base. The base housing was mobile homes they shipped over from the states, and of course that was uptown as you can imagine. That just really ... fancy uptown, a sixty foot mobile. Sixty foot [by] twelve wide or whatever it was mobile home and we lived on base, and uh—then in '55, summer of '55 or August, in fact it was August I think. August, September of '55 we came back to the States to Valdosta, Georgia.

TINKER: What was that change like? Coming from France to ...

EDMANDS: Well, I don't know. The change when I came from overseas to the states back and forth—the military's one big family. I mean, when I was in high school I went to Okinawa. I walked in there, and by the end of the day people had taken me under both arms. I was in clubs, and I was playing football. You go to the States and do that, everybody walks around looking at you, and you know, you don't have any friends. It's just a total different, total different environment. But in the military, everybody's [saying], "Come on in," you know. You may run into somebody you knew overseas, and things like that.

TINKER: Um hmm.

EDMANDS: It's a total different deal, and I always loved the military because of that. Give you a real—when I was in Valdosta the high school was segregated. I never went to school with a black. I didn't know anything about a black other than I lived across the railroad tracks. A month later I'm in school in Okinawa, and I'm sitting in a classroom with blacks, you know. No big deal, but that's a total, total different sociology or whatever the word is—transformation that ...

TINKER: Right.

HESSLER: A different world.

EDMANDS: ... yeah.

TINKER: I saw in the questionnaire your mother went to college. Did uh—and that your father, [It] says here, was born in Rhode Island.

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: Now how exactly did they meet up? Or how did he get to Tennessee?

EDMANDS: Well uh, Dad was born in Rhode Island from a ... on that side I come from Bostonian family. And his father moved them to Atlanta when he was yay big. (Gestures) Then they eventually came to Knoxville.

TINKER: What did he do for a living, that they—moved to Atlanta?

EDMANDS: You know—you'd ask me and I don't even know ...

TINKER: That's curious.

EDMANDS: I don't even know what my grandfather did. (Laughs) I gonna ask that question. I never thought of ...

TINKER: 'Cause at that time that's a big move.

EDMANDS: Yeah, well it is. It's a big move.

HESSLER: Oh yeah.

EDMANDS: I do not know why—I need to, (Laughs) I need to ask that question.

TINKER: Huh, you can check on that, and we'll add that in later. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: I need to ask that question. But uh, they both ended up here in Knoxville. Of course, Mother's born and raised in Knoxville. And, they both ended up in Knoxville and I think they met here at UT, at a dance. Dad's older than Mother by five years. Which in younger—that's a big gap when you're in your twenties. So, but uh, they met here at a UT dance I believe.

HESSLER: And here we are, back at UT. (Laughter)

EDMANDS: Yeah and by the way, my mother was—who is still alive and is spry as anybody; she'll be ninety-one this summer, except she's losing her eyesight ...

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: Was majorette for UT when they had one majorette.

TINKER: Really?

HESSLER: Cool.

EDMANDS: She was the only majorette on the field, and she was majorette for the team that went un-scored on in '39.

TINKER: She's the one and only majorette? (Laughs)

EDMANDS: The only one, yes.

HESSLER: Talk about pressure. (Laughs)

TINKER: Isabel Robinson.

EDMANDS: Yeah, and then ...

TINKER: Well she's a piece of history.

EDMANDS: ... oh wait a minute. Then she went to North Carolina and my grandfather was almost—he was a professor here, in agriculture. And Mother always ...

TINKER: Oh, he was a professor at UT.

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: Oh wow.

EDMANDS: Yeah, and then my mother always said she went to North Carolina because every place she went on campus [people] said, "Oh, your Prof. Robinson's daughter." And she said, "I didn't want my dad knowing everything I did." [Laughter] So she went to North Carolina the last two years, and that's where she graduated.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

EDMANDS: And she was the only majorette there.

TINKER: Well, what did she major in?

EDMANDS: Uh, I wanna say sociology or something like that, yeah.

TINKER: Okay. Did she ever do anything with her degree?

EDMANDS: No, no not in the field. She worked for TVA during the war, in North Carolina ...

TINKER: Um hmm, okay.

EDMANDS: And probably had something to do with her ending up at North Carolina. [University] And then as a military wife—in those days you couldn't have a career, and my father was an officer, the wife was expected to do all of the officer's club and all the things that they do. So, in fact a wife in those days was frowned on if they had a career. They were expected to be part of the husband's career.

TINKER: So, ya'll came back to Valdosta, and how long were you there?

EDMANDS: We were there from '55 to '61 and we stayed extra long because Dad went—in '60, he went on a remote tour to Korea.

TINKER: Oh did he? What was his job, what was he doing in Valdosta all those years?

EDMANDS: He's transportation/logistics all his career. He was the motor pool officer, and moved people's household goods, and that kind of thing.

TINKER: So he could have been moved anywhere?

EDMANDS: Yeah, yeah absolutely. His job was anywhere.

TINKER: Yeah, his job was anywhere. Okay.

EDMANDS: But, he went off to Korea for a year, and the mother was left raising the three of us.

TINKER: Um hmm, and you've got two sisters right?

EDMANDS: Right. And so when Dad's assignment was up in Korea, he's looking down the road—you know, he knows he's got enough time, he knows he's gonna be retiring—down the road and stuff, and he thought, "That's a one-year assignment." He says, "I need to do a three year assignment." And he said, "if we stay over here and I do a three year assignment, then I'll beat ever having to that again—to retirement, we won't do another France—or in this case, Okinawa." So, he extended as they called it to Okinawa, and by doing—he went only two years instead of three, but he got three year credit because he was in Korea, and there both in the Pacific.

TINKER: Um hmm.

EDMANDS: So by going to Okinawa he got three years credit, and I guess at that point thought he'd never go overseas again. Then he went to Vietnam, so ... (Laughs)

TINKER: Your dad did? What year did he get sent to Vietnam?

EDMANDS: Yeah, he came back right as I was going in the service, so he was there, '66.

TINKER: Isn't that something?

EDMANDS: Basically the year of '66.

TINKER: Wow.

EDMANDS: I sat him down, uh—one time with a video camera over my shoulder, and talked to him about his World War II experience, and I got from the time he started Knoxville 'till he got back to Knoxville, everything in between—on video tape, about an hour and a half. And I was going to do that for Vietnam, and during that time he fell and hit his head and died. And I didn't get it.

TINKER: Oh ... that's too bad.



EDMANDS: Um hmm, yeah [...].

TINKER: So when he went to Vietnam, did he just do one year?

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: Yeah, one year.

EDMANDS: Yeah, it was standard. You go to Vietnam for a year and come home. It was a standard.

TINKER: Where was he stationed at?

EDMANDS: Well he started out in, I know he was in Saigon or around Saigon because he just missed that bombing. I don't know if y'all know about that, they bombed the top of a hotel restaurant or something. He just missed that. And then he ended up in Udorn [Thailand], because he told, I remember he told my mother—he couldn't tell Mother where he was. But he told Mother to read a lot of *Time Magazine* or something, and they had a big article about Udorn. (Laughs)

TINKER: So that was kind of the clue? So, where did you graduate high school?

EDMANDS: Naha, Okinawa.

TINKER: So you graduated while you were over there.

EDMANDS: Yeah overseas, Dependant High School. And came back, graduated there, they extended like a month or something for me to graduate. As soon as I walked across the stage, we got on the airplane and came home, came to Tennessee.

TINKER: Did you play a lot of sports in high school?

EDMANDS: I played football. I was real big in Boy Scouts, and that's where all my time went.

HESSLER: Yeah, I was a Boy Scout myself for many years.

EDMANDS: Yeah, well you understand, you can put a lot of time in it if you ...

HESSLER: Yeah it was fun though, camping.

EDMANDS: ... oh yeah, oh yeah. I got to be an Eagle Scout. The whole bit, I did it all.

TINKER: That's good preparation.

EDMANDS: But I tell you, a real eye opener was when I left Okinawa and came here. Because my parents, in preparation for me to go to college went down to the Hong Kong tailor, and had a

complete outfit made. I mean I had tuxedo, I had suits. I had sports coats, you know all cheap. I walk into an environment here, and none of it fits. I mean—you talk about stickin' out. Nothing I had on—I had nice embroidered silk vests, and you know there all wearing the khaki pants with the blue shirt with a button down collar. Man you talk about sticking out.

HESSLER: Fish out of water. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Oh, oh boy was I.

TINKER: Did your dad ever comment on, or maybe when you interviewed him—how his military experience, or how he thought the military changed from World War II until you know, he got out?

EDMANDS: No. I don't know if he ever—it changed drastically for me.

TINKER: Well, like when he'd come home from work. Things he would say.

EDMANDS: I don't think, I think the big change in the military came after his career. The things like wives working, and the things like deemphasizing drinking, and all those kind of things were in my career and not in his career. So uh, but you gotta understand I am a ward of the state from cradle to grave, cause when I was born I was in the military, when I went to basic training I swapped my dependence card for an active duty card, and then when I retired I got a retiree card to death, so.

TINKER: So, when you graduated and came back here—you came back to Knoxville?

EDMANDS: Right.

TINKER: Okay and you were going to UT?

EDMANDS: Yep.

TINKER: And the draft was in full swing?

EDMANDS: Yep, and I joined the ROTC and that gave me a deferment. I went along three years, and I flunked out. I tell you the darn course that flunked me; it was some kind of four-hour geology course. And of course, I was right on the line. If you had to have a 2.0, I had 2.0001 or something, I never had any more. (Laughter)

EDMANDS: But, I messed up and flunked out, and had to stay out a quarter. So I lost my deferment, and when I came back—then they wouldn't give me my deferment back. So I was a junior. So I'm goin' along fine as a junior—and they had called me in the summer and did the entrance physical. They do that to everybody, I mean it's a pre thing. So I had done that in the summer. In winter quarter of '67, which started in January, I was here registering. Going through registration, and I thought you know, I hadn't heard from them rascals in a while. I better call 'em and just make sure that—what's going on.

TINKER: Right. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: I called them uptown, and the lady says, “Yeah, you’re on the February draft call, you’ll get your notice like [the] tenth of February.” And I says, “You can’t do that, I’m in UT and going to school.” She said, “We don’t care, you’ll get your draft notice.” And so I ran straight downtown to join the Air Force. Uh, and they said, “well we got such a ... “

TINKER: You mean right away, like that day? (Laughs)

EDMANDS: ... yeah she said, “Well we got such a waiting list that we can’t handle you at all.” And I said, “I’m gonna call my father.” He was a colonel in the Air Force then. “I’m gonna call my father, somebody’s gotta get me in the Air Force.” Recruiter says, “Do you have two years of ROTC at UT?” It was mandatory then. I said, “Oh yeah, I’ve long completed that being a junior.” So he says, “Go get me a letter, and bring me back that you completed it and we’ll put you on a delayed program.” So then I enlisted and they held me for two months, and then I went in.

TINKER: So what was going on at the time? I mean, what did you know about Vietnam that you were just determined to get in the Air Force rather than go through the draft?

EDMANDS: Well let me tell you what—no, no. The thing is, having [been] raised in the Air Force, I knew I didn’t want to be in the Army, and that’s what you got drafted into. It wasn’t Vietnam, it was the darn Army. I don’t want no Army. I don’t want in a foxhole man.

TINKER: Okay, so it’s more, you just didn’t want to be in the Army?

EDMANDS: ... oh yeah I wanted the blue suit man. I didn’t want a green suit. [It’s] the family tradition man, I stay blue suit. (Laughter)

TINKER: Right, right. (Laughs) Cause you thought, well if I’m gonna go in I wanna ...

EDMANDS: Exactly right. If I’m going in, I’m going in the Air Force. It’s just simply as that, there’s no question.

HESSLER: Carry the torch ...

EDMANDS: Most draftees went in the Army; few I think went in the Marines and stuff. But the draftees were all going in the Army and I just wasn’t going to do that. The thing in those days—and it’s hard to tell people these days about it—everybody tried to avoid the military, tried to avoid the war. You got out of high school, you had two choices: college or military. There’s no other choice. I mean, just think of that. You come to two doors, and you gotta go through—there’s no third door. You’ve got two doors. You can think of it [at] your age. (Points at Hessler)

HESSLER: Hmm, I know. Yeah ...

EDMANDS: And that was it.

TINKER: Unless you were married and had a child.

EDMANDS: No, that didn't help.

TINKER: Really?

EDMANDS: You'd think—oh yeah, I knew people that were married and got took. And I tell you an interesting thing. You know this happened to me when I was registering in January, and I finished—I didn't finish registration because I ran and joined. So I didn't see anybody. I'd gone home for Christmas didn't see anybody, go off you know, four years. I come back four years later, I go back to UT. I was in business major, I go back in there and set down in a classroom, and guess what?

HESSLER: The same people.

EDMANDS: There's everybody I was with four years ago.

TINKER: Cause they went too. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Exactly right, it happened to everybody. And so were all, "Where'd you go? What were you in? What did you?" Yeah.

TINKER: So ya'll go on Christmas break, and find out in January you're on the draft roll, and then so everybody either gets drafted or ...

EDMANDS: Yeah, in March I'm off in the military, and it happened to everybody. I couldn't believe it, we all just ...

TINKER: So how quick did you leave for basic?

EDMANDS: I left on the 20th of March.

TINKER: That's fast.

EDMANDS: Oh yeah, and they held me for two months. They put me in the delayed enlistment, they called it. But they enlisted me, but they held me. I didn't go anywhere for two months. It was like they hold you for so you can't be drafted, until they can get you in a basic training slot. But, it was two months and then off I went.

TINKER: Then you did your basic where?

EDMANDS: At Amarillo, Texas. You ever heard that one? Amarillo Air Force Base.

TINKER: No, not for basic.

EDMANDS: Well in the Air Force, they—it was at Lackland [Air Force Base] and they had a problem at Lackland. They had a hepatitis epidemic, and they closed the base. And in three days they opened Amarillo up in north Texas, which was a closed Air Force Base.

TINKER: So just right at that time, they had a hepatitis outbreak?

EDMANDS: Yeah, yes.

TINKER: They closed the whole base down?

EDMANDS: Yea, well when you've got something like that you can't receive people or ship people 'cause they are sick.

TINKER: I did not know that. Did they quarantine everybody that was there?

EDMANDS: Yeah, yeah.

TINKER: And then so all the new people coming in, they go to this Amarillo.

EDMANDS: Right, right. Now, when they got—that got solved before I came along, okay. That happened before me, but what happened is—because the Vietnam War was needing so many people, that they left Amarillo open. So, when I came along—it was maybe a year before or something I went in, and it was all fixed by then, but they left Amarillo open. So when I went in, I remember when I flew on a plane from here, to like Dallas, there was a guy from Vonore [Tennessee] and we met. He got on a plane to San Antonio, and I got on a plane to Amarillo.

TINKER: Didn't—I've never heard that.

EDMANDS: Yep, went to Amarillo and it was a miserable existence because the base was not set up for basic training. It was a closed Air Force Base, and so they didn't have facilities, you know, to handle volumes of people. We were in World War II barracks that—it was just awful shape. It's just is a miserable existence. It was—and as you can imagine, I'll tell you—say, being in the Air Force I know how it worked. You call to Lackland, and you say, "Pick ten of your instructors, and send them up to ..." Who you gonna send up there?

TINKER: Right.

HESSLER: The one's you don't want there. (Laughs)

TINKER: The one's you don't want there, or the one's you don't like.

EDMANDS: That's exactly right. And you talk about ... No, the ones that they're your problem children, and the ones that don't perform, and I mean they were all at Amarillo. Awful.

HESSLER: It was boot camp right? So it wasn't supposed to be ... (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Oh, it was awful.

TINKER: So what was awful—give me a story. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: The guy in charge, the guy in charge of my flight was an eight-year E-4 [senior airman]. Now, that's pretty dang slow. He'd been in the service eight years and he was an E-4. And all he knew how to do was holler and scream and punish. That's, you know, unfortunate. That's all the guy knew.

TINKER: Yeah, huh. Was there anybody else from Tennessee in your flight?

EDMANDS: No.

TINKER: You were the only one?

EDMANDS: Nope, it was all scattered all over. I can remember we had people from New York, California, and everywhere in between.

TINKER: And was that six weeks the standard?

EDMANDS: Yep, yeah it was a standard six weeks.

TINKER: Okay. How was the food?

EDMANDS: The food was fine. I don't ever remember having a problem with the food. The problem I had was, is they'd march us up in front of the mess hall in a formation and the TI, the training instructor, would go in and sit down and eat. But we had to wait our turn. When he got through eatin' we left. If you hadn't gone in there and eaten it didn't matter. He'd march us on off and we would go do something else. I can remember going through the line with my tray, and they had something they'd say, "Up and at 'em and out" or something like that. And I got my tray, and so I go out of the serving line and walk around here and get in the line to put it in the window, and I'm doin' this (Eating gestures). I'm literally doing this as I walk up to the window to turn in my tray. Yeah.

TINKER: You're trying to eat and turn your tray in at the same time. (Laughs)

HESSLER: Get what you can.

EDMANDS: Yeah, standing in line trying to eat as fast as I could. (Laughter)

TINKER: That's pretty good. I have to confess, I was in the Air Force too. That's why I'm kind of getting a little extra kick out of this. I did get to go to Lackland, of course I didn't go in 'till '88, but I can—when I was, when we would go in the mess hall, chow hall, up front, in the middle, was where all the instructors would eat. It was called the snake pit. And so you could

just randomly get chosen, [called] up in front of the snake pit for whatever reason. So it's just a massive room full of poor airmen at various stages trying, all trying to be invisible. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: That's right, that's exactly—that's the same thing happened to us. They'd select somebody and have you stand up and do something.

TINKER: That's funny. Well, when did you get to pick your, or did you get to pick your job?

EDMANDS: Oh, let me tell you that's a very interesting story. I told—when I went down and was enlisting that I wanted to do something with airplanes, be you know a crew chief, maintenance. We finally selected air passenger which is kind of flight engineer running terminals, logistics kind of stuff with airplanes. So when we get to basic training they tell us, “We're gonna give you a battery of tests, and you need to do as good as you can on these tests because it goes on your permanent record.” So I really tried hard. Well, one of them was your propensity to learn. So they gave me a test about language. Well I know good and well I flunked that, I can't even speak good English (Laughter). But, but they gave a test to learn Morse code, well guess what, I knew Morse code in the Boy Scouts.

HESSLER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: So I aced that test, and guess what. Right hand turn, I am no longer in air passenger. I am now ...

TINKER: You aced yourself right away from the aircraft.

EDMANDS: I went into communications intelligence. It was called ditty-bop operator. And they sent me to, when I graduated, they sent me to Keesler Air Force [Base in Biloxi, Mississippi] to Morse code school. And I have a hearing problem and I couldn't—when the dit's and da's got closer together, I couldn't differentiate.

TINKER: Oh.

EDMANDS: And they thought I was doggin' it because when we did four-a-minute (snaps fingers) man, I was first in the class. Did eight-a-minute I was second in the class. You know, did ten-a-minute and I'm the last one in the class to pass, and then they get to twelve and I can't pass it. And, so they think that I'm doing that on purpose.

TINKER: Okay, okay.

EDMANDS: And they send me to the hearing doctor at the hospital, and he sent a report back and says, “He has a hearing deficiency, that when—he can't differentiate good enough that when the dit's and da's get too close together, that he can't differentiate enough.” And I remember this chief called me in the office and he said, “I don't believe a word of this. Your doggin' it and you're gonna stay here if it's four years 'til you pass twelve.”

HESSLER: You were unaware of your hearing problem or whatever?

EDMANDS: Oh, we knew it. He had to report.

HESSLER: Did you, did you know?

TINKER: Before that, he means were you aware or unaware of it?

EDMANDS: Was I aware I had a hearing problem, no. But did I have a hearing problem, yes. And I probably did for a long time.

TINKER: But it wasn't severe enough that you ever realized it?

EDMANDS: No, no. It's a tone deaf, and what that means is you hear from here to here. (Gestures) I hear from here to here. But that piece I don't hear gives you definition in what you're trying to hear. So if you and I are carrying on a conversation sitting here I hear fine, but if we do this at a cocktail party I couldn't understand a word you're saying. I can hear you, but I cannot understand because of background noise.

TINKER: Oh, okay. Okay.

EDMANDS: And so when we get dit-da-dit, it's okay, but when it's dee-dee-da-dee-da, I can't ... But that's hard to—but that sergeant, that chief looked [at] me and said, “By God I know you're doing this on purpose, and you're staying here if its four years.” (Laughs)

TINKER: Well how long did it take him to figure out you weren't doggin' it?

EDMANDS: Well he didn't. I finally passed it. Took—the school was ten weeks, and in the thirteenth week, they just kept me there week by week, and in the thirteenth week I finally passed it. But the lucky side was, again we got one of these Y's in the road. And if you do well at Morse, you're going off to the second school and learn to get faster and faster, and to pass is eighteen-and a half, and a lot of those guys got up to twenty-five words a minute. The other is non-Morse, what I went into, where you copied communications, teletype, radio teletype, and stuff. But you had to know Morse, because the operators, when they said it, would come up on the air and they'd talk back and forth in Morse to set up, find a good frequency. And they'd come up and say, “This frequency is not good, let's go to this one and try it,” When they got that set, then they'd go into cipher, which nobody could read. We just taped it, and sent it to Fort Meade, Maryland where they tried to do something with it.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: But that was lucky, because Lord I wasn't tied to a typewriter all day. I used to see those guys upstairs from me, [they] would be in that career field, and eight hours they sat there with headphones on and did that.

TINKER: The Morse guys.



EDMANDS: Oh yes, awful, absolutely awful. At least I could walk around and get a drink or something. Oh, it was terrible.

TINKER: So non-Morse included radio, and were there other things?

EDMANDS: Well, the mission I had—I'll tell you what I did, it was so long ago that it doesn't make any difference. I was in Alaska, Elmendorf Air Force Base, at Anchorage. And I copied the Russians, and if you look at our sites, there all around Russia. It's like Alaska, Korea, Japan, Philippines, Italy, Pakistan, Germany. It just rings Russia.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: And so, I had what—priority mission, and I'm always supposed to copy the one highest on the list that's copyable. I'd have an assigned mission, and so if I know you two are coming up at three o'clock, I'd have on two headsets. I'd have 'em over this ear and here, and over this ear and here, and two radios, and I hear ya'll come up. Ya'll would de-da-de-da with each other, and if it wasn't good enough you might send a de-da-de-da frequency, (Snaps fingers) and you'd be gone. And so I'd role the thing up on them and when they came up there I would be waiting on them, and they' come—but anyway, when they got locked up, then they'd turn on their cipher machines.

TINKER: Okay.

EDMANDS: It's radio printer, it's like a teletype that goes—Western Union. Just a radio printer, Western Union's radio printer. And so, in the Soviet Union—they had no infrastructure, communication, telephone lines and stuff in those days. So if Moscow wanted to tell Vladivostok something across country they had to do it radio printer. They had no other way, and so we could read the mail so to speak. Except, all the military was encrypted. Now, they did things—I never had the mission assigned, but I copied it. It was like Western Union, they would send telegrams. What they'd do, the admiral in Moscow and would send a telegram to Vladivostok and say, "I'm coming out there next week for two days, make reservations at the hotel or something." We copied that stuff and tracked those people.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: And then there was some communications—weather. Weather was really big for us because we reported straight to SAC [Strategic Air Command]. So, we're getting—we're copying weather inside the Soviet Union, and sending it straight down to Omaha [Nebraska], where they're giving their SAC pilots, who are ready to take off and go bomb the Soviet Union. And of course, those folks would come through every now and then. They'd fly—a plane'd come with a load of colonels and generals out of SAC headquarters, and they'd come talk to us and see what we were doing and stuff.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: It was, I tell you what, as exciting as that may sound, it was an absolutely miserable career field. Absolutely, I hated every minute of it. Because you're tied to that position eight hours, okay, and if you're in the service you understand that if you got a dental appointment or something, you sign out and go for an hour to do it. That was all on my time. There was no leaving work for anything. You were there and that was that. It didn't matter if it was Christmas or New Year, or Fourth of July. I think in Alaska I had one holiday off in two years or something like that.

TINKER: Well what about, so ... what about Russian ships, submarines? You all didn't have anything to do with those communications?

EDMANDS: No, but I tell you what, the day that the *Pueblo* was captured—we had, upstairs from me was radio direction finder [The 1968 Pueblo Crisis]. We had this huge antenna outside that they called the “Elephant Cage” it looked like they were building ...

TINKER: Oh, is that the big massive one?

EDMANDS: Yeah, it looks like they were building the Superdome, and got the framework up and quit.

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: Big round huge thing. And it was an AN/FLR-9 [antenna type]. It was classified then, I couldn't even tell you what it was. It was a terrific antenna, an absolutely terrific antenna, and uh—where was I goin'?

TINKER: About the guys that were working upstairs.

HESSLER: Submarines maybe?

EDMANDS: Oh, upstairs over me was Army and Navy, and then above them was the ditty-bop guys. But the Army and Navy guys ran radio direction finding on that antennae. And what they'd do is—let's say that I couldn't find one of my guys. And I'd call up and say, “I found a signal on XYZ frequency, would you shoot it?” And so they'll shoot it and get a direction, and they'll get Japan to shoot it and get a direction, and maybe get the Philippines shoot it and get a direction, then they'd call me and I'll go to the board and put the strings all out and where they cross is where the signal is coming from.

TINKER: That is cool. (Laughs)

HESSLER: Triangulation.

EDMANDS: And then I'd try to decide if, 'cause here's the way it worked. If I copied that guy for four hours, and [it] turned out to be the right guy, I got credit for it. But I copied him four hours and it wasn't the right guy everything went in the trash can. I was like dead-time. [As] far as the Air Force was concerned I was wasting time. So you had to learn those things.

TINKER: Oh, I see. Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: But anyway, the day they captured the *Pueblo*, they were talking by radio teletype to guys right above me. So we knew real-time what was going on.

TINKER: Really?

EDMANDS: Yes, absolutely. We knew the ship was captured. We knew that they had got everything, they were unable to throw the stuff overboard, the whole bit. We knew it all. And I'll never forget, the next day—I had a piece of equipment went [from] here to that wall. (Gestures)

TINKER: Did ya'll think you're about to—like, a war was about to go down?

EDMANDS: Well no it wasn't, no, no, no. There wasn't—to us there wasn't any threat. No, no. There was no threat, it was just that they had captured a—see I worked with top secret stuff, and it's all of a sudden, if they've captured all that, that means all my codebooks, everything I do is compromised. So I'm gonna get all new stuff, and I'm gonna have to do it you know, “That's what, oh man here we go I'm gonna be working [until] midnight.”

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: But I had a piece of equipment went here to there, and its radio racks, and it had all kinds of radio stuff. They brought me a sledge hammer. The next day they came in and gave me a red sledge hammer and said, “There, if something happens, you're to beat your equipment like happened on the *Pueblo*.” (Laughs)

TINKER: Really?

EDMANDS: Yes. Do you know why the *Pueblo*, why we got burned on that so bad?

TINKER: Why?

EDMANDS: They had racks of equipment, and I can't even remember ...

TINKER: Didn't they shoot some of it or something?

EDMANDS: No, no. They had racks of equipment—what happened is, the paper they use is water soluble, which means you put it in water and it dissolves. So when they started taking over the *Pueblo*, one of the guys grabbed up a handful of stuff, ran out and threw it overboard and they shot him, and killed him. So after that they locked the door, said, “We can't do that.” Well they had a burn apparatus, but they could only burn like a page or two at a time. So it was useless. Well what happened in these racks, and again same thing like I had, they had pins you pull, and acid bled down through the racks. And they replaced it with phosphorous grenades that you pulled and let the phosphorous burn down, or vice-versa, I can't remember. But anyway, the *Pueblo* had been in Sasebo, Japan, the Navy place, they had taken out the system, and they had

installed the other system when it went out on this mission. So they caught the boat, they had no way to destroy their stuff.

TINKER: Oh.

EDMANDS: And we knew, being up there in the communications I was in, we were able—some other guys doing it, being able to follow radars and stuff, they saw that a large Russian transport flew into the area that night where they captured the *Pueblo*. And so we guessed that all the stuff off that boat had gone to Moscow, and of course years later we found out that it had.

TINKER: Oh, yes.

EDMANDS: It had all been loaded up and gone to Moscow, yeah.

TINKER: What a shame.

EDMANDS: Yep.

TINKER: Well, and the *Pueblo*'s still like a, you know, trophy for them.

EDMANDS: It's a thorn in the side of the Navy, you know, the one they got—the one they lost.

TINKER: Yeah. That's terrible.

EDMANDS: And we had, when I was at Kelly Air Force Base [in San Antonio, Texas] in the last of my first four years, they had some of the crew come talk to us after they got out. They came to, you know, a kind of a classified briefing of what they went through, and what had happened to 'em.

TINKER: So you got to meet some of them?

EDMANDS: Yea, yep. Some of the officers and enlisted men came and—see we were all in the same career field. They [were] just on a boat, and I was in a building. Otherwise, we were all doing the same identical thing.

TINKER: Right, right, hmm. Do you remember anything they said that really stuck with you from that briefing?

EDMANDS: No I don't. You know, I don't know.

TINKER: I was just wondering if something they said, and you just like—you know, kind of ...

EDMANDS: No, you know I remember there wasn't much that was a surprise by then. You know, maybe a little more detailed. But you know, the thing where Bucher tried to drown himself in the mop bucket, and stuff like that. But, we'd heard a lot of that before. I guess they just gave us a more detailed account, but I don't remember anything that ...

TINKER: How much did you keep up with what was going on in Vietnam while you were, during those years?

EDMANDS: Well I guess no more than what was on the news. My mission ...

TINKER: 'Cause you're just so far removed from it, you're basically the Cold War era during Vietnam.

EDMANDS: Right. Yeah, and that's the joke I always laughed about. Everybody's doing everything they can, and I mean the people my age back when I was at UT, you know, "What can I do to stay out of Vietnam." [They said] "Can I get married, and have a kid? Can I take some kind of drug? Can I fake something?" You know, it was an old thing to put a bar of soap under here, (Gestures to underarm) and hold it there until you go in for the physical, and it's supposed to do something to your heart or something. And they'd, disqualify you or something.

HESSLER: I've never heard that one before. (Laughs)

TINKER: What? I've never heard that one either. (Laughs)

HESSLER: Creative.

EDMANDS: Oh ... I'm tellin' you. Everybody, "What can I do to keep from going in?" Oh yeah, "What can I do to keep from going in the service, or flunk the physical or something?" And then, there I volunteer and get in the service. They send me to Alaska, I got a top secret security clearance, and I'm not allowed in a war zone. They wouldn't send me there if they needed me. I was not—I carried paperwork that says I cannot be allowed in a war zone, 'cause I can't be captured.

HESSLER: Thanks to the Boy Scouts.

EDMANDS: Yeah, thanks to the Boy Scouts. (Laughter) Yep, you're exactly right.

TINKER: That's right, Lee.

HESSLER: That's pretty cool.

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: [I] never thought of it that way. Huh ...

EDMANDS: But I tell you too, if you're in the Air Force, we'd get off, and I worked four swing shifts, twenty-four off. Four mids, twenty-four off. Four days, then ninety-six hours off, and start swings again. We had commanders call when I was on day shift. So our day shift ended like six fifteen. Well the headquarters group usually didn't come in until eight o'clock in the morning. So, we'd have to set there, and wait until eight o'clock in the morning to have commander's call. And then they'd come in and conduct commander's call, and of course everybody's in there

nodding off to sleep in the base theater. The first sergeant's going around poking everybody saying, "Wake up, wake up, stand up." You know how that is, you're in the service, so. (Laughs)

TINKER: So what about Alaska? I mean did you get out and enjoy any of it? You went to Anchorage a lot?

EDMANDS: Oh yeah, oh yeah I loved Alaska. I absolutely loved the place, yeah. Alaska was a wonderful tour.

TINKER: What made you love it?

EDMANDS: Just everything about Alaska. I mean it's just a great place. I've always said, if it wasn't for East Tennessee that's where I'd live.

TINKER: Really?

EDMANDS: God, just a wonderful place. Wonderful people, things to do, you know you wouldn't think that there's anything to do but there's stuff to do year round. I mean, skiing, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, it's just year-round.

TINKER: What about those, the dark periods?

HESSLER: Yeah, a whole month of darkness.

TINKER: What is it? Yeah.

EDMANDS: Well, you know then, they talked about that up there, that people had psychological problems, and would commit suicide and stuff.

TINKER: Yeah, you always hear that. Yeah.

EDMANDS: Boy I never had that problem, because you could go skiing and so many things. You know the neat thing about that period, you could start bar-hopping at one-thirty in the afternoon 'cause it was dark. (Laughter) I'm serious, you laugh, [You would hear] "Man let's go to town and bar-hop." It's two o'clock in the afternoon.

TINKER: No, I know. I'm sure young service members, that's what they'd be doing. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Yeah, absolutely. You know, go down there and the night life's goin' at two PM.

HESSLER: Hmm.

EDMANDS: Yeah, and the summer was the opposite.

TINKER: I was gonna say, what about the daylight?

EDMANDS: We'd get off at midnight, or eleven o'clock, and by ...

TINKER: You could go do whatever you wanted to do ... (Laughter)

EDMANDS: ... I'd be fishing at one o'clock in the morning. Yeah, standing in the middle of the stream man, fishing for Salmon. One o'clock in the morning, absolutely. Absolutely. (Laughter)

HESSLER: Oh, wow. Hmm

TINKER: Have you been back since?

EDMANDS: Oh yeah, I've been back a number of times. My job in the Air Force, my last job with NORAD, I—the unit up there, I supported, so I went up there several times. And I went up there three times with my [National] Guard unit. I was in the Guard for a while, with a unit down in Georgia, I up there three times on exercises. In fact, I was up there in eighty-nine when they set the cold weather record for North America, minus eighty-three, [°F] now it wasn't that where I was, I was at Anchorage and it was like minus twenty-five, minus-thirty.

TINKER: Minus eighty-three?

HESSLER: Yeah, that's cold enough.

EDMANDS: But the chill factor where we were in Anchorage was minus one-twenty-five.

TINKER: Now didn't they have record snowfall this past winter, too?

EDMANDS: Yeah, oh, they're having a terrible time up there.

TINKER: Like, like massive snow ...

EDMANDS: Yeah, Saskatchewan or some place is just, just is totally buried. Yeah.

TINKER: ... buried. Yeah, like the whole town. They were having to send the town supplies, and stuff because the town was buried.

EDMANDS: Right. Right, yeah I think the snow's as high as the roof or something. They're having a terrible time up there.

TINKER: So when you came back, where did you, you said you went to, was it Kelly [Air Force Base] When you came back, that was your next base?

EDMANDS: Yeah, yeah. When my time was up at Anchorage—another one of those things, in that career field there's only one state-side assignment. I mean you can go to the Philippines, you can go to Japan, you know, all over the world. Germany, Pakistan, and all these world-wide places you can go, and there's only one place in the States.

TINKER: Kelly.

EDMANDS: Yep, so everybody came to Kelly when they came back to the States, and what would happen is people would—every time there came time to rotate, they'd go down and volunteer for another year or something. And usually, it was about seven years before they finally made somebody move, and what they'd do, when they got to Kelly [on] the first day they'd go into personnel and volunteer for overseas and [commit to] the shortest possible time, whatever, and they'd go back overseas.

TINKER: So you didn't stay at Kelley very long?

EDMANDS: Well, I was getting out by then. I had less than a year left in the service.

TINKER: Oh, oh that's right. That's right.

EDMANDS: I went there in June or July and I got out in December. So, I guess I had six or seven months left in the service when I went to Kelly.

TINKER: Now, during this period were you writing a lot of letters home to your parents?

EDMANDS: Well, I was to my wife.

TINKER: Oh, you'd been married by then?

EDMANDS: Yeah, oh yeah. I got married when I was at Keesler.

TINKER: Okay.

EDMANDS: You know it was one of those things, I'm in college, and she's here—she was working, she wasn't at school, and I was working and we decided to get married. It was kind of like, I thought, "you know if I'm in Air Passenger career field, I've got a great chance of being stationed on the East Coast, Southeast United States. So, you know, we'll just keep going." And lo' and behold one day I call her up and say, "You know, not only am I not going to be stationed in the Southeast, I'm not even gonna be stationed in the United States." I had—all the choices are overseas. And so then we decided to go ahead and get married so she could possibly go, and luckily I got Anchorage, which was a state. I didn't even have to get permission for her to go to Anchorage. That was just like going to another state.

TINKER: Um hmm, that's good. Right. Was she a native of Mississippi?

EDMANDS: No, she's from Johnson City [Tennessee] and was a student off and on at UT.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

EDMANDS: Mm hmm.



TINKER: So you wrote a lot of letters though, I mean ...

EDMANDS: Yeah, and I wish I had 'em now.

TINKER: ... yeah. What about picture taking?

EDMANDS: Well, we got divorced and you know ... so I don't know if they exist, or she even had them. She's been dead since like ninety-seven. She had cancer, so I don't even ... I've told my son, "You ever run across that stuff, grab it." (Laughs)

TINKER: Your letters, and ...

EDMANDS: But her, her sisters, she had like three sisters [who] came in and stripped the house where she lived and her husband, her current husband said, "Take what you want."

TINKER: So you don't know what, [or] if she had kept your letters or not, or anything?

EDMANDS: No, I have no idea. Even things like wedding pictures and stuff they took. My son doesn't even have 'em, so.

TINKER: Oh.

HESSLER: Hmm.

TINKER: That's too bad.

EDMANDS: If it was there it's gone, but I sure wish I had them—because basic training was [an] absolutely miserable experience, I mean absolutely miserable.

TINKER: So what did you first do when you got out?

EDMANDS: When I first did what?

TINKER: When you got out at Kelley, when you separated.

EDMANDS: Came back to UT.

TINKER: Did you?

EDMANDS: I mean my mind was made up. I was gonna get my degree. I had ...

TINKER: And this was in business? You wanted a business degree?

EDMANDS: Yeah, well I was in business [for] first three years or whatever.

TINKER: Okay.

EDMANDS: But uh, I mean my path was—there’s nobody denying me this. You know, I had G.I. [Bill] I am going straight to school and get that degree in the least possible time. This, this four year experience [has] been the worst experience in my life. I always said, “I got in the hole, and I’m gonna get out of it, and I’m never getting back in it again.” (Laughs) Then I came here, and I graduated in four quarters ...

TINKER: And you used your G.I. Bill?

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: Do you think that was a pretty good deal?

EDMANDS: Absolutely. Absolutely the best thing ever happened.

TINKER: It paid for everything?

EDMANDS: Well, I wouldn’t say paid for everything, but it certainly made in road. Uh, I wanna say I drew 230 a month, and registration and books a quarter was probably one-and-a-quarter, 150 dollars. You think that’s crazy now but, but that’s about what it was then.

TINKER: That’s probably about three books now.

EDMANDS: Yeah.

HESSLER: Yeah, yeah. (Laughter)

EDMANDS: Yeah, and my wife, because I was considered whatever the term is, under-employed or not employed, or poor or whatever, she qualified for a program and they sent her to school for a year to be a secretary. Over in Knoxville someplace, ev’ry mornin’ she went up and went to her business college, and I went to UT, and she got paid for that. They paid her something like sixty-dollars a week or something to do that, and that helped. You know, I mowed grass, worked for a service station at night, did things to try to supplement that, lived in my grandmother’s house. So I wouldn’t say the G.I. Bill covered everything, but ...

TINKER: But it helped y’all get by quite a bit.

EDMANDS: ... big help, oh yeah. Oh absolutely, absolutely, a big help.

TINKER: What about, did you ever get any loans, or use any other VA [Veterans Administration] services?

EDMANDS: No. No I was able to pay as I went, payday.

TINKER: So just the G.I. Bill.

EDMANDS: You know [I] was able to pay as I went so when I got out school I didn't owe a penny. I didn't have anything. (Laughter)

TINKER: And you graduated, what was it, '73?

EDMANDS: '72. March of '72.

TINKER: What did you do then?

EDMANDS: I started goin' around and interviewing. I didn't you know, some reasoning in my mind, that I didn't look for a job until I graduated, but I didn't. And so, I started going around. I went down, fixed a resume, went down to the printer and had a bunch of them printed off and ...

TINKER: And what were you hoping to do with this resume?

EDMANDS: Well I was hunting a job, and I hoped to stay in Knoxville.

TINKER: But, what kind of business?

EDMANDS: Well I was looking for something—I wanted to work in service management. [It] was what I wanted to do in those days. That's like when you go to the car dealer, and the guy that runs the department that fixes your car. That's the service manager.

HESSLER: Shop Foreman.

TINKER: Oh, Okay.

EDMANDS: But I wasn't looking for car dealer, I was looking for something bigger than that. You know, maybe for the railroads or something, and run a big deal. And so I started goin' around just handing out resumes. Like you know, here, here, here, (Gestures) and cold calling, and by-golly one day I got a—let me see, I got a call to go up to Kingsport [Tennessee.] and I went up there and I interviewed with Mason-Dixon, and they ended up offering me a job. I got a call from Stowers Machinery, who was a Caterpillar dealer for all of East Tennessee, and they offered me a job. And there was one other company, I don't remember, but there was one other company offered me a job. Just like that, bingo. [It was like] nothing, nothing, nothing, and then bingo, I had three. I went up—when I was on the interview at Mason-Dixon ...

TINKER: Now what's Mason-Dixon?

EDMANDS: Trucking lines. They may not even be here anymore. [They] used to be a big trucking-line in this area. Used to be a major trucking line. They [have] probably been absorbed or bought-out, or something now, but their home-office was Kingsport.

TINKER: Okay.

EDMANDS: And they took me up there and they had this huge facility, and you're up on the second floor, and there's glass windows, and they've got the offices in there. And they're sittin' there interviewing, talking to me and you can see all these bays down through here with all the tractor-trailers pulling in, and they were doing inspecting [is] what they're doing. They're fixing things, flat tires and stuff.

TINKER: Um hmm.

EDMANDS: And the manager's sitting there telling me—he says, “Now, you go to work for us [and] you're gonna be over this.” “Your gonna have a shift and you'll be over this whole building, and all these people will be responsible to you.” “And understand they're all union, and when you go down to that end of the shop they're going to quit work on this end, and when you come back to this end they're gonna quit work on that end, and you're gonna have to contend with that.” I said, [to self] I don't need a job like that. (Laughs) I'm looking for something; (Laughs) I'm looking for something better than that. So I just told 'em I wasn't interested. I ended up going with Stowers.

TINKER: Did you?

EDMANDS: And so I, but I didn't stay with them. I hired with them in, I guess it was April and they laid me off in December. They had this uh, oil program they were going to do. [It was] where they take the oil out of an engine when they change the oil, and then you look at the oil and see how many parts-per-million there is of brass and steel and all this in it, and if you see an engine goin' bad then you can stop it and tear it down before it actually goes bad and croaks and it's not rebuildable, so.

TINKER: Right. Right, exactly

EDMANDS: That was the excuse. What it was, was the guy that was in charge of service management for them, their overall guy, had a sixth-grade education. And here's this wet behind the ears college kid gonna come in there and do what he's doing. And of course he came up the hard way as a mechanic and everything, and he just really felt threatened by me. In fact, he told me on the interview that ...

TINKER: So he's just somebody that's been with the company—a long time and ...

EDMANDS: ...yeah. And you know how you go around on the interview and talk to each major manager and stuff, and when I talked to him he says, “You're gonna fail in here, and I'm gonna see you fail.”

HESSLER: Hmm.

TINKER: He said that to you?

EDMANDS: Oh yeah, right to my face, but you know, I'm not a kid then. I'm twenty-eight years old or something, had military service and stuff, and so I'm like, “Okay I'll show you.”

But, he did everything in the book to make me fail. He told me to do things and they'd be wrong and then he'd tell me that he didn't tell me to—just you know the whole bit. I really think he was in the, behind the scenes and got me fired; I think what happened. They told me the president of the company said we decided that were not going to do this so were gonna let you go and they were real nice to me. You know, gave me a month's pay and did all the things; there were no, no hard feelings about it.

TINKER: Huh.

EDMANDS: But the, but the joy I got out of that, it was about a month later they fired him, so. (Laughs)

HESLLER: Hmm. (Laughs) Payback.

EDMANDS: Yeah, payback that's it.

TINKER: Well, I guess, I guess it came back; yeah it came back around on him like that. Yeah.

EDMANDS: He's the one that got hurt. It didn't hurt me, I was starting out, he's the one that got hurt. Yeah.

TINKER: That's a small world because I've—last year or the year before we interviewed Eugene Stowers ...

EDMANDS: Yeah, right.

TINKER: ... that started the company. Did you know that he had been a Marine in World War II?

EDMANDS: No, now how could you have interview him? I thought he was dead.

TINKER: Eugene Stowers?

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: He's not passed away yet.

EDMANDS: He must be ninety years old.

TINKER: He's elderly, but he's still with us.

EDMANDS: Well, I be darn. I thought he and Bud had both passed away.

TINKER: Uh, well but—he's called Bud. That's his full name, Eugene Bud Stowers.

EDMANDS: Well what was his brother's name? Maybe his brother passed away and I thought it was him.

TINKER: Now it might, it may be, because the one we interviewed, Eugene Stowers, he got out of it, and ...

EDMANDS: He flew fighters in the Pacific.

TINKER: ... he was a combat engineer. He was a combat engineer—in the Pacific.

EDMANDS: No, no. We're not talking about the same—cause the one I—he was a pilot in World War II because he ...

TINKER: That's probably one of his, uh, brothers ...

EDMANDS: ... he flew the company airplane. They had a company airplane and when we went up, when I was doing the interview, we flew to Johnson City [Tennessee] and he got up there and flew the airplane. I remember him talking to me about; he was a marine pilot in World War II. There was two of 'em. There was two brothers.

TINKER: Yeah, uh—Wes Stowers, he runs it now. You're prob ... I bet that was his Dad.

EDMANDS: No, I'm not talking about Wes. I've never met, yeah I've never met Wes. I've talked to him but never met him.

TINKER: But that was Wes's dad. Eugene is the one that—he's actually, I think started the company, and then his, brought his brothers in, and then Eugene got out of it and got into real estate, or something.

EDMANDS: Well the two of them started the company on Chapman Highway. They were in a building that had formally been, car dealer, or something. I can remember ...

TINKER: But anyway, it was just so interesting to me because that was out of Eugene Stowers—Bud's ...

EDMANDS: Well I'll have to ask Wes if he's still alive. I thought he was dead.

TINKER: Uh, let me pause this.

HESSLER: [That's] a good idea, that's some good ones. (Laughter)

EDMANDS: You can always delete it if you don't want it, I mean ...

TINKER: Well yeah, we can cut it out if it gets, (Laughs) okay, yeah we're going.

EDMANDS: They—during the interview, I said to them, you know, "I wanna end up running this company" "That's my goal."

TINKER: Yeah, at Stowers, yeah.

EDMANDS: And I said, “Do you have somebody in the family that’s gonna take over the company.” And they said, “We got this young’n so to speak,” and Wes was his name, and they said, “But he has no interest in the company, he’s going a different direction he’s gonna do something else, so we have nobody set up to replace us.” I said, “Fine, that’s what my goal is.” And of course six, seven months later it was a whole new street, but ... (Laughs)

TINKER: Yeah, it was a different story.

EDMANDS: ... yeah and Wes was the one. Then I noticed years later, you know you keep up with ‘em, cause you get a little bit, and peace about the company. But I had saw that Wes came, and I said, “Well, he didn’t stay in another direction, he came back to the company after they got older, so.”

TINKER: Yeah, and I believe he went to, didn’t he go to the Air Force Academy? I think he, I believe he ...

EDMANDS: I don’t know. I didn’t know that much about him. I wanna say they said he was in teaching or something but, I can’t remember what they told me, but it was one of the sons.

TINKER: ... think he went to the Air Force Academy. But anyway, now my cousin works—got a job with them after he got out of the Marine Corps. He was a diesel mechanic in the Marine Corps, well tanks in the Marine Corps. Then he got out and started working for them. (Laughs) So he’s been with them ever since he got out of the Marine Corps. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Well, I was surprised they were able to do as well as they did after the interstate system was built. Because when that was being built, and all those federal dollars were flowing, hiring that, or buying that very, very expensive equipment’s okay, but when that dries up and you’ve gotta go do jobs for some local municipality or somebody without all those big bucks—I, they seem to have done fine. But I wondered about that a year, or years later.

TINKER: Okay, so you ended up, when you left Stowers, what ...

EDMANDS: Well let me tell you while, let me tell you my military side.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

EDMANDS: After I got out of the service, I came home in December of ’70, and went to UT [in] January of ’71. In one of my summer classes, it would be the summer of ’71. Up there in Glocker, we had no air-conditioning in those days, and the windows are up, and you’re up just, you know, doin’ this (Gestures) it’s just miserably hot. Cost accounting, I can tell you what it was, cost accounting class, [it] had long tables like this, and I’m sitting in there beside this guy [while] waiting for the instructor to come and he—you know, you gotta realize, I’m the oldest guy on campus. You know, you don’t think four years is a big deal; you come back to school [and] you’re an old guy on campus you know. So I’m sitting in class and he said, “Did you serve

in the military?” And I said, “Yeah.” And he started talking to me about it, and he was the bartender at the club at McGhee-Tyson. [Knoxville Airport]

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: And he started telling me about the National Guard, [rather] the Air National Guard, and then I said, “That’s too good to be true, it can’t do all of that.” So, the next time I had a break, I drove out to the front gate out there, and I said, “I want to find out about the Air National Guard.” They send me up to see this Sergeant Henry and he said, “right this minute we don’t have room for you, but we’re starting a new unit this fall. [It’s] a communications unit and we could certainly use you.” So, as a result of that I ended up getting in [during] November. November of ’71, I joined the Tennessee Air Guard.

TINKER: Oh, okay. Huh.

EDMANDS: And so, then my last part of school I was getting a paycheck, and that was helping, and the monthly paycheck from that, and that helped out, and so ...

TINKER: Wow, well that worked out.

EDMANDS: ... and so, yeah. So I started doing that.

TINKER: And they just happened to be starting up this communications unit, right when you, hmm.

EDMANDS: Yep. Yep, yeah. 228<sup>th</sup> Combat Communications. They just happened to be starting that, they ...

TINKER: That’s good timing.

EDMANDS: ... they had their first drill in October, and then in November they enlisted me. I started doing that, and I was still in school, and of course, when I laid off from Stowers I was able to go out there and pull some duty, and kind of help get some income until I could find another job and so forth, so.

HESSLER: How many people did you go in, down there with, when you went to the job—as the radio communications? Were there several people went down there with you, or ...

EDMANDS: Oh, you mean when they started the unit?

HESSLER: Yeah, since it was in its infancy or what not.

EDMANDS: When they started the unit, they robbed a bunch of people from the other units on the base. But, when you say that—you’ll understand this being in the military (acknowledges Cynthia), rank structures. When you’re in the Guard, you can’t be promoted unless you’re in a



position. If you're a staff sergeant, and want to make tech [sergeant], you've got to get in a tech position.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: So, you've got a whole base full of people [who] want to get promoted, and there's a brand new unit, and by the way, it's got a colonel's position, it's got major's and captain's positions. It's got E-7, [E]-8, [E]-9, positions. So if they come to you and say, "Hey Tech Sergeant, I've got a master sergeant slot if you want to come over there." (Snaps fingers) Bam, you've gone over there. And so, that's what I call robbed. They got all these guys from other units, and brought them down there, and they held the first official drill in October and then the unit's off and running.

HESSLER: Okay.

TINKER: Mm hmm, hmm.

EDMANDS: But the beauty of that is, you're starting the unit with the expertise; maybe not in the job, but you've got actually, the guys that know the Guard, and got the uniform and the whole bit. And so you can stand the unit up real quick like that. And of course, when I got in they were taking all these guys [that] were Vietnam era guys. Some from the war, some not, like me. But they were just—every drill, they just, everybody they pulled in was, you know, come off active duty from four years, and, and were pulling them into the unit.

TINKER: Mm hmm, uhm ...

EDMANDS: And by the way, I said guys, because there were zero girls, in those days. (Tinker laughs) We had—my commander had the first female in the Guard in Tennessee that wasn't medical.

TINKER: Oh really?

EDMANDS: So they had, got her in our unit. She was prior service Air Force, and he got her in the unit, he had to fight city hall because they did not want to do it, and he got her in the unit.

TINKER: And she was just admin?

EDMANDS: Admin., yes. She was the first one in the, first one in the state of Tennessee, and it's probably [nineteen and] '71, or '72 ...

TINKER: They didn't even want her in even as admin. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: ... and he also had, I think the first black.

TINKER: Oh, really?

EDMANDS: Yeah, yeah.

TINKER: When did you, did you apply for OCS? [Officer Candidate School] How long after you graduated?

EDMANDS: Yeah, uh. Well let me tell you. You know I got in the Guard, [it] sounded like a good deal, and I really loved it. I got in, [and I was like] “Man this—you know they treat people right, you’ve got opportunity.” I didn’t feel that way in the Air Force. You know, I don’t feel like I was ever treated like a decent human being, and I had no opportunity. I kept asking the Air Force to do the Boot-Strap Program they had back then; send me back to college and let me finish and get my degree, and get commissioned and I’ll make a career.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: And it was always, “wait ‘till your next assignment.” And you know who told me they’d finally consider sending me to school? It was when I was out-processing. The personnel guy said, “Hey, you wanna go Boot-Strap?” and I said, “Go to hell.” (Laughs) I’m going to Tennessee man, I’m out of here. (Laughs) I ain’t even talking to you, but you know, the more I got involved in this, I said, “Hey, I’d like to stay around this.” Of course, I was working on my degree then, and so I went to Commander, I kept going to him and saying—you know, and he had openings; he had Officer’s [positions] openings, and I kept saying, “I’d like to get a commission and stuff,” and then finally got my commission, and kept going to him and going to him. And finally he relented, and said, “Okay, do the paperwork.” Then they sent me to Officer’s School, and I got commissioned. He told me when he retired, many years later, he said, “I didn’t want to commission you.” Because, he said, “I didn’t think you were the right person to be commissioned.” And he said, “If I hadn’t commissioned you, that’d been the biggest mistake in my career.”

TINKER: Hmm.

EDMANDS: And I thought that was quite a compliment.

TINKER: That was nice.

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: He admitted he was wrong.

EDMANDS: Yep, he said he was, and then the First ...

TINKER: That doesn’t, that doesn’t happen very often.

EDMANDS: ... First Sergeant told me, you know the First Sergeant, after he retired, I visited him one time, and he says to me, he says, “You know, the Colonel was dead-set against commissioning you, and he said, between you going and seeing him every time you came out here and wearing him out, and me beatin’ on him all the time about to give you a chance, that ...

TINKER: Where did you go to OCS [Officer Candidate School]?

EDMANDS: At McGhee-Tyson, that's where it was.

TINKER: Oh, really?

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: Well that was convenient. You didn't have to go far. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Yep. Didn't matter that I was from here, I was locked up for six weeks.

TINKER: Right. What was the experience like; what did you think of it?

EDMANDS: Well it was a great experience. You know, they challenged me quite a bit, and you know you learned a lot, and I did pretty good, and right in the—I'll tell you what happened right in the middle of it. You know, going back to this thing with the Guard and all these slots, it isn't like the Air Force, you know you're always moving people, or things. They sent me there to be—in the Guard, to go to OCS, you go against the slot. It isn't like the Air Force [where] you get commissioned [and] they find you a slot. It's the opposite.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: They can't send you to be commissioned unless they got a place for you. And so they sent me to be the transportation officer for this unit, which is exactly what I wanted to do. The Colonel came up to class one day and he pulled me out of line and he said, "I just put somebody in your slot, a guy in another unit lost his slot that was a transportation officer, so I took him." So he says, "I've got an admin. slot and you can take that, or I got another unit that will take you as a weapons controller" And I said, "No, the admin slot's fine." "I could care less, I just want a commission" (Laughs) So ...

TINKER: Right. Huh, do you have anything? (Gestures to Hessler)

HESSLER: I was gonna say, you couldn't stay in transportation? Cause that was what your father did as well, wasn't it?

EDMANDS: Yeah.

HESSLER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: Yeah, that's what I got my degree in, logistics, in the business school. That's what I wanted to do, but it really made no difference in the scheme of things. I went into admin and never looked back, so the saying goes. (Laughter)

HESSLER: And the rest is history.

EDMANDS: In fact, let me tell you what. In the military, the admin—I was personnel officer, admin officer, historian, you know, I did all those kind of jobs. You know how you get additional duties. (Gestures to Tinker)

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: But I did all of those jobs. That's the greatest basis for a career of anything you can do. And those are the people that always do the best. If you look around the service, it's the darn personnel people, and the admin. people that know how the system runs, and know how that personnel stuff, [runs] are the ones that do well in this system. Of course I didn't know that. I kept trying to get over in communications again. But that gave me a terrific background for my career.

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: It really did. Havin' that knowledge.

TINKER: Well, Do you think—I've noticed you've commented, I believe, on your questionnaire. You said how the experience you had wouldn't be, with bein' treated badly, affected how you then as an officer treated people. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Oh absolutely. I said it once, I said it a hundred times. I said I'm gonna get commissioned and I'm gonna do what I can to change things. You know everybody has that you know—in my own little way, I am going try to change things and not treat people like I was treated. And they say too, if you're in the Air Force you know a lot of time your officers had enlisted background were—were a lot easier to deal with then, people who had just came in as officers. And they doesn't make them bad. They just haven't had that experience.

TINKER: It's a very different experience.

EDMANDS: Yes, it is. Absolutely is.

TINKER: A friend of mine did that. She's still in and one of the best officers—I was in maintenance, I was aircraft maintenance. One of the best officers I ever had, she was prior enlisted. It's just a different perspective.

EDMANDS: Yeah. Whole different way they approach you, they talk to you, they ... you know.

TINKER: Then again, you can have a senior NCO treat you like ...

EDMANDS: Oh, absolutely.

TINKER: I mean, here I have this officer, it's ...

EDMANDS: Well, let's go back and talk about during the Vietnam War. The NCOs that I had to work for were all, you know, sixth grade education, lifers in the Air Force. I was nothing but a

college brat. And so, they took a shot at me every time they could. [They would say], “College brat, go, go clean up the cigarette butts. Go wash out the coffee thing. Mop the floor.”

TINKER: Really?

EDMANDS: Absolutely. Oh yeah, we were college brats. And of course, everybody in there my age was a college brat. You know, I had three years, but other guys had two years and other guys had a year.

TINKER: So, they really—well, me and Lee were sorta talkin’ about this before you got here. I was saying how I could see probably that happening. Like here are these lifers, these NCOs are having deal with probably some pretty, you know some people they rather not deal with. Then good people, like you, get lumped in with them. But they treat you all bad.

EDMANDS: Yep.

TINKER: Because of sorta the bad apples.

EDMANDS: But you gotta realize that the military in those days had all these draft people. Everybody that was drafted didn’t want to be there. So, you had a military full of people of that did not want to be there and they’re only focus was when’s my get out date. The only focus. “I’ll do whatever I gotta do to get back ‘til I can get out.”

TINKER: Well, then these NCOs and officers are having try and deal with this ...

EDMANDS: Exactly right. I can look at their side now and say well, they had a ...

TINKER: A tough job.

EDMANDS: You know when you’re tryin’ to lead people and no one, none of them wanna be there. That’s what I say, when they all volunteer, the military changed overnight. It’s a great place to be now. Because everybody there wants to be there. You know.

TINKER: Yeah, for years after I got out I wish I had stayed in.

EDMANDS: I had a sergeant tell me when I was in tech school one time, I got written up ‘cuz my shoes didn’t shine or somethin’ in the formation. He says come report to me and I went to his office. It was ‘bout twice the size of this room and he had all these one stripers. You know ten of them all in the room with him that did his bidding. He was a staff sergeant and I went in there and reported to him. And he started chewin’ me out. He started givin’ me this, “The Air Force was doin’ so much for you. They’re paying you. They’re giving you a place to sleep and they’re giving you three hot meals a day.” And I got so mad. I said, “Sergeant, let me tell you somethin’”. I was in college, trying to get my degree, and ya’ll yanked me up out of that and brought me here. You’re not doing a dang thing for me.” I said, “You gonna chew me out about my shoes, chew me out about my shoes. But, don’t tell me how good I got it ‘cause ya’ll have ruined my life.”

TINKER: (Laughs)

EDMANDS: And boy, he just shut up. He didn't say a word. He just sat there like a deer in the headlights. And all those guys that in room later says, "I can't believe you did that." (Laughs)

HESSLER: Wide-eyed.

EDMANDS: Oh man, I tell you. Haven't seen anybody do that to him. But boy, he just—I was ready go to the brig, I guess. But he just hit me wrong, he did there.

TINKER: I'm trying to keep up here with—so from '73, basically, when you graduated until what year you were at McGhee-Tyson?

EDMANDS: Well, I graduated—well, I got my commission in '73. I graduated school in '72. Got my commission in '73. Was there at McGhee-Tyson, now I also started working at the guard academy and that's where they commissioned officers.

TINKER: Oh okay.

EDMANDS: I look back at my career, never realized this 'til it was over. But, I look back at my career, every time I got a promotion or opportunity it was because they had a problem and they selected me to fix it. And you'll see that as we go through this. It never dawned on me, I thought it was luck that I happened to ...

TINKER: At the time you're going through it, you're just thinking "Hey, this is great."  
(Laughs)

EDMANDS: At that time, I thought well luck or something. I never tried to get a job in a service and got it. Not one single time. But yet, every time I got one it's 'cause somebody had a problem and they came to me to come solve the problem. So, I got—I was sitting at the bar one afternoon after drill and this major that was in charge of the air guard academy out there with commissioned officers was doin'. He says, "I lost three officers this week. And we're getting ready to start a class and I'm hurting. Would you be interested in becoming a training instructor?" I said, "Lemme, think about it." So, I went home and thought ...

TINKER: Now is this academy for ...

EDMANDS: Officers. For the whole country. They did at McGhee-Tyson, believe it or not.

TINKER: Okay, for OCS. For whole country.

EDMANDS: All fifty states and four territories sent their officers here. In fact, that program was here until a year ago when they now combined it with OTS program in Maxwell [Officer Training School]. They move it, a year ago, but it was here.

TINKER: Okay.

EDMANDS: And so, I went home and thought about it. Said, “Yeah, I wanna do that.” I was in business—had a business with a guy. I went to the business and said “I’m outta here, you can have my part of it, I quit.” And he says, “You can’t do that.” I said, “I am. I’m already gone. I like the military. I got an opportunity to go active duty.” And I went active duty and never looked back. So I stayed there and I was active duty with them [for] about six years. But I was captain and I had very little opportunity to move up to a major. And I said, “You know to get promoted, I need to move.”

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: I started putting feelers out. And they started a brand new communications unit at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa [Florida] with a joint communication support element. I ended up talkin’ to the commander down there, he had me fly down there, and he hired me. And so I went down there. I up and moved and went down there for a couple years. He hired me because of my military experience at the academy. He wanted somebody coming there that could instill military in his brand new unit. You know, he was one of those guys that wanted a spit and polish and standin’ straight. He thought I could help with that and then my communications background [helped out].

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: I went off down there for a couple of years. I was on airborne status and you don’t see people in blue suit do that, but I went down there and jumped. Then the unit, we had a sister unit at Brunswick, Georgia that their detachment commander left, went to headquarters. A commander of that unit came down one day in my office and asked me if I’d take the job ‘cause he thought I would—he said the things he needed straightened out up there and one of them was admin. He says you got the background that can do that. So, I took that job, went up there, and immediately put major on.

TINKER: Mm hmm. Immediately. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Yeah, well, I mean, when you got the time and grade and you get in a slot they put you in.

TINKER: Now, you said you jumped at MacDill. How did you get to do that?

EDMANDS: Well, when I went to academic instructor school at Maxwell to do the job at McGhee-Tyson, this girl in the class had jump wings. Little Air Force gal, couldn’t been hundred pounds. Little ‘ole tiny gal. And I said, “How in the world did you get jump wings?” And she said, “Well, there’s an army school in Fort Lee, Virginia and I talked to them and they let me go.” So, I said, “Heck, if you can do it, I can do it.” I wrote them a letter. I asked the boss if I could do it and he said “Oh yeah, go ahead.” He didn’t think I’d do it. So, I wrote a letter to the Army and asked them to give me a slot in that school. Well, didn’t hear anything. So a year or two passed, and all of sudden I’m sitting there one day, like in December, and the phone rang.

And they said, uh—no, I think it was November and the phone rang and the guy says, “We’re canceling you for the class next week.” I said, “Wait a minute, I’ve never heard I was in the class.” He says, “Yeah, we’re canceling you next week. You’ll be in the first class in January,” [in] Fort Lee, Virginia.

TINKER: You didn’t even know you’d been accepted in the first class. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: No, I didn’t even know I’d been--out of the clear blue. So, I go to the boss and the boss says, “No, no, no, no. Time out. Wait a minute. You can’t go runnin’ off doin’ that.” I said, “You told me I could.” He says, “Blah, blah, blah, blah ...” So, then I went up the chain and I couldn’t get anybody to agree to let me go. Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C. says, “Hell no, you got no business jumpin’ out of airplanes.”

TINKER: (Laughs)

EDMANDS: So, finally, I called up the tag of Tennessee, General Wallace. And, uh, you know, we’re not bosom buddies, but I know him and called him up. I said, “General, I hate to bother you, but you’re my last hope. I said I have approval from the Army to go to jump school and need somebody to step in and let me go.” He says, “Don, let me call you back.” And that afternoon, this colonel in Nashville that worked for him called him and says, “You got it, give me the information.”

TINKER: Mm hmm. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Off I went. So I got it, but never thought I’d use it. Went and did seven jumps in jump school, got my wings and never thought I’d use it. But, when this job came open in Florida at that unit, guess what? The guys gotta be jump qualified.

TINKER: Wow.

EDMANDS: In years after me, they hired people into it and sent ‘em to jump school. But here the commander hired me out of the officers’ school. I got jump wings. I got communications background. Man, I fit his unit like a glove. So, he hired me and I went down there and jumped with them.

TINKER: That worked out good.

EDMANDS: Our mission was—I was airborne commander for the unit—and our mission was to jump in radios with an invasion force. Something like a Grenada or something. You would go in; you’d jump with the army commander and you’d get on the ground. You had a little satellite, miniaturized radio. You’d set it up and then give the phone to the commander. He could call the president, [or] whoever he needed to.

TINKER: Were there any particular missions during that time you might want to talk about?

EDMANDS: No, we never got anything, unfortunately.



TINKER: You didn't have anything. Let's see, '84 to '86, right?

EDMANDS: Yeah, unfortunately, in my career I missed everything. I was always too early or too late.

TINKER: That happens.

EDMANDS: And I mean, you know, everybody gets stuck and goes. I always, always on the wrong side of the line when somebody ...

TINKER: Whenever the big stuff happened ...

EDMANDS: I left the unit at Andrews [Air Force Base in Maryland], I hadn't been gone a month, and they activate them for Bosnia. (Laughs) Daggum it! Story of my life, man. (Laughter)

TINKER: Well, that happens. Believe me. I missed Desert Storm because I was already in process to come back to the States. So, here I'm sitting at the dorm and my unit is flying off to Turkey. I didn't even have a chance. I don't know for sure if I'd have got to go, but I didn't even a chance.

EDMANDS: You know how I felt. Man, I ...

TINKER: Oh, I killed. You just feel killed, feel left out. (Laughter) So, what was it like those two years at MacDill? I mean, was that pretty intense? Because that's different than what you were doing before.

EDMANDS: Yeah. Well, it was intense because the level of everything moved up a notch. Now, it's intense at the academy 'cause you've got students and you're trying to push them through a program.

TINKER: It's a different kind of pressure.

EDMANDS: Yeah, it's absolutely different. But, we worked with a Joint Communications Port Element, JCSE. It's a one of kind unit in the military. They belong to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They are comm [communications] for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And so, the Joint Chiefs of Staff says where they go and what they do. And what happened was, back in the early '80s, as the military was growin', they didn't have enough money and stuff to expand JCSE. So, they took two Guard units. They started a new one at MacDill and they took the one at Brunswick, Georgia and re-rolled 'em as JCSE units. And so they effectively doubled the size of the JCS. Now, the JCS's actually made up of all four services and then the two Guard units, augment them or double the size.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: Of course, that doubles the equipment and everything. And so when I went into that environment, all of sudden the people I'm dealing with everyday are active duty Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. It's no longer Guard. Guard's gone. I mean, I'm on active duty and I'm in the active—I'm going up to Readiness Command Headquarters and sittin' in meetings and stuff. I mean it's totally, totally different.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: So, from then on ... I was there two years and then I went to the sister squadron in Georgia for seven years. So, I was in that joint environment for nine years.

TINKER: Did you ever work with Air Force Special Operations or have anything to do with them?

EDMANDS: Not anything jumps out, but I'm sure I worked with them because—here was our mission, you go out and you set up at a headquarters, like where Schwarzkopf is. Then I had four satellite packages. One satellite package went out with a Green Beret, one went out with Special-Ops, one went out with Navy Seals. So, that was our mission: that we had a satellite terminal and then we ran out phones and all the digital stuff to 'em to use, and that's how they got back to headquarters, through the satellite ...

TINKER: So you all set up their entire communications package.

EDMANDS: Right, exactly right. Yeah, when they go bare base, they go into a bare base, we go in and provide everything they need. In fact, the unit I had at Andrews even had air traffic. I had the radars, the control tower, the GCA [Ground-Controlled Approach], the whole bit. I could into a bare base runway and be landin' planes.

TINKER: Wow. And you were in charge of coordinating all that?

EDMANDS: Yep.

TINKER: That sounds like a pretty good job. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Yeah. It was a lot of fun.

TINKER: Was your family with you in Florida?

EDMANDS: Well, I wasn't married when I went to Florida.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

EDMANDS: I met a gal in Brunswick and we got married in '89. But yeah, you know I had divorced before I left Knoxville.

TINKER: And your son stayed with your wife?

EDMANDS: Yeah, he was here in Knoxville. So, I was down in Florida as a bachelor, I guess you'd call it. But, man, I worked a lot of hours, lot of hours. You know how it is in military. Worked a lot of hours. But ... uh, like I said, much higher level, but it really was fun, you know. It was an awful lot of work, but at the same time you were on the inside, you know. You were seeing the things. You had impact. You know, you sat at the table—I sat at the table with generals and colonels and they're trying to make decisions on how to do things and I could give them my input and perhaps make impact on the big picture. That was really fun.

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: In fact, I'll tell you a story about my hearin'. I'm sitting in there at this meeting, and all colonels and generals around the table. All of sudden the meetin' stops and everybody looks at me. And I'm like, "Uh-oh, what I'd do?" And everybody's lookin' at me. My watch is goin' off and I can't hear it. (Makes watch alarm sound) I can't hear it out here. Put it up here and I could hear it. (Gestures with hands)

TINKER: Because they were all talking.

EDMANDS: Yeah, they all stopped talkin' and looked at me 'cause it's like your beeper going off. (Makes beeper sound) And I can't hear it and I'm sitting there saying, "What are they all lookin' me for?" (Laughter)

TINKER: That's funny. Well, I hope they all laughed about it, instead of just kept staring at you.

EDMANDS: Oh, you know what they said, ... "That captain, boy!" (Laughs) "It's a captain mistake, don't worry about it. He don't know no better."

TINKER: Did you have any questions, Lee?

HESSLER: I can't think of any. I just think that would be real rewarding, you know, sitting in with those high ups.

EDMANDS: Oh, it was. Absolutely. I'll tell you a rewarding experience growin' up, before I got in the service, was all the people in the service in those days were World War II veterans. Because you take twenty years past World War II, you're up to '65. So all in the '50s and the '60s, all those people were runnin' around. In fact, the guy that pinned my eagle had some notoriety and wished I had kept his ... some notoriety—shootin' down the most German fighters on a single mission or some kind of notoriety like that. Just all kinds of people like that I ran across growin' up.

TINKER: You got to meet them and hear their stories.

EDMANDS: It was amazing to grow up that way. And I can remember; we'd go places like at Valdosta. They had a rec camp and Dad would take me out there fishin'. I'm like 14, 15 years

old. He'd go up there in the screened-in porch with all the other officers and they'd drink beer and they'd talk about World War II. And I'd been down there fishin'.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: But, he never talked about it in front me. Never said word until—when the fiftieth anniversary came along, all of sudden he started singin' like a canary and that's when I got him to sit down and do the tape, but up until then—you know, I didn't even know [that] when he was at Hill is when Roosevelt did the thing about bringing the minorities in the military. They call my father in one day and said, "We're organizing an all black battalion," or whatever it is in the Army deal. "And you're going to be a company commander, and of all blacks." And the reason they did that was because the thought process in that day [was] you need a Southern white officer to handle blacks. That was the thought process.

TINKER: Interesting.

EDMANDS: That was the thought process. And so they made Daddy in charge of—and I never knew that. Until this fiftieth anniversary, I never knew that. And then he went over to Guam. He went to Guam with a service company of blacks. And he told me stories that ... I remember one of the stories he told me that—of course, they're worried about [the] Japanese. They had the island; they're flying missions to Japan. But he said, you know, the Japanese are still in the bushes. And he said one night, all of a sudden, there's all this firing and said he rolled out of the bunk, got his .45, and put his helmet on and everything and goes runnin' out and all of the black troops are shootin' their guns in the air. Well, it turns out that's the way they celebrated New Year's or something. And he said, "Well"—and you've been in enough of these stories [to know that] bullets are accountable. So he says, "Now I got a problem that they've shot up all this ammunition. Now how am I gonna go get more ammunition 'cause bullets are accountable." Right?

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: So he says, "First Sergeant said to me, 'Sir, don't ask any questions.'" And Dad said the next day they all had bullets." (Laughs)

TINKER: They found a way to work it out I guess.

EDMANDS: Yes, so they next day, he said, we all had bullets again.

TINKER: That's interesting. That's interesting too, that he didn't ever talk to you about anything until ...

EDMANDS: Yeah, never mentioned nothin'. All I knew was he was in Guam.

TINKER: Until the fiftieth anniversary and he sees everybody else talking about it. And I guess it prompted him to talk about it.

EDMANDS: I guess, yeah.

TINKER: That's interesting. When you left MacDill, did you the same kind of job at Brunswick, Georgia?

EDMANDS: Well, no, it was a higher job. When I was at MacDill, I was operations officer. I was up or over the operation side of the house. And my job was current plans and operations, or something like that. But what I did during the week was I wrote the plan for the people to come in on the weekend and train. I wrote the plan, made all the "literally we're gonna pull this cable from A to B or we're gonna set this ... up..."

TINKER: Oh, okay.

EDMANDS: [I] put all that on paper. And then when the traditional people came in on the weekend and got the plans, they look down there and say, "Okay, my job is to go over to point X and erect an antenna." So, uh, that's what I did. Now, when I went from there to Brunswick, I was what they called the base detachment commander that's commander during the week. There's full-time people there, I wanna say thirty-five of them or something, during the week, so I'm the full-time commander during the week and the commander of the unit only comes on weekends. So, he's off at his civilian job.

TINKER: Okay. Oh okay.

EDMANDS: So I'm the commander during the week, and they call it base detachment commander. And so I'm the daddy rabbit responsible for everything and because of that I do all the things a normal commander would do. I did budgets and ...

TINKER: Well, I was gonna say, you're basically the commander.

EDMANDS: Yes, and so I did things like budgets and monitoring money and writing orders, and all those kind of things a normal commander would do, I did. So, the commander really came in on the weekend and all he had to do was, you know, train people and stuff and then he'd go back home.

TINKER: Well, even though he's just coming in on the weekend, through the week were you in contact with him?

EDMANDS: Oh yeah, we'd talk to him on the phone about things and stuff.

TINKER: But he just wasn't actually coming on base.

EDMANDS: Yeah, he wasn't there.

TINKER: Okay. But, I mean, as far as the unit mission, was it similar [to MacDill]?

EDMANDS: Oh, it was the identical same mission.

TINKER: Exact same unit mission, okay,

EDMANDS: It's the sister unit of the one in, uh ... It's assigned to JCSE as a sister unit to one in—the only thing we had different in Brunswick was you had a Tropo [tropospheric scatter], microwave units.

TINKER: Tropo?

EDMANDS: Tropo is what they call it, tropospheric scatter. See, when you shoot a radio wave ... [due to] the curvature of the earth, the radio waves goes off, [it] doesn't bend with the earth, it goes off into outer space. So what you do with a tropo system is you aim the antenna in such a way that it goes up, the signal goes up, bounces off the troposphere, and comes down.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

EDMANDS: So that's ... and when they show it to you, they call it tropo.

TINKER: So ya'll had that there in Georgia but not ...

EDMANDS: Yeah, and the reason they kept that is because that unit's mission before they re-rolled the JCSE, they had tropo equipment and tropo-trained people. And the JCSE said, "We don't have that capability and we need it." So they, when they negotiated for the unit to re-roll they kept that. And to give an example, now a minute ago I was sayin', here's headquarters and here's, uh, Special Ops, if you don't call them that. And when we got a shot, it goes satellite down.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: If they're not more than 150 to 175 miles apart, and they weren't, you can use tropo. And you're not usin' satellite time. You're just shooting radio to radio. And that's one of things I could never get over during Desert Storm is that it absolutely killed the satellites, putting all this stuff across satellites, and they never used tropo.

TINKER: When they could of, for the shorter distances.

EDMANDS: Yeah, absolutely, especially with that flat terrain. [With] tropo, you're worried about running into mountain peaks or something. I mean that flat terrain is perfect for tropo, but they never, never used 'em. They only used the satellite.

TINKER: I didn't know that. So much of this new—this communication stuff is new to me.  
(Laughs)

EDMANDS: Satellites, military satellites, there wasn't enough of them and so they were having to buy commercial time, which was extremely expensive. But they were having to shoot on commercial satellites in Desert Storm.

TINKER: [I] did not know that.

EDMANDS: They took one of my guys, my plans officer, when Desert Storm started and we trained ...

TINKER: So during Desert Storm, you're still at Brunswick?

EDMANDS: Yeah. I was gonna tell ya, they sent my plans officer from Brunswick down to headquarters at CENTCOM [United States Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida], and he wrote all the satellite architecture for Desert Storm. He was in the group that wrote all that architecture, the whole work. So that's how we were totally involved in the whole thing with Desert Storm. But I'll tell you what happened to me. They were taking people, and when Desert Storm started, they'd call units. And they got to go, and nobody else got to go.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: So then they started this volunteer program. [They] put you on a list, and we need your AFSC [Air Force Specialty Code], [and] you get to go. And so I asked the general I worked for. I said, "I'm putting my name on the list." And he says, "No, you're not." He says, "You do not volunteer to go to Desert Storm." He said, "If that unit gets called up and you're not there to run things, I don't know what I'd do." So he says, "No way. You do not."

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: So I went through the back door (Laughs) and told people, "I'm not officially doing this, but call me up if you can." I still didn't get called up, so. We had a couple dozen people go, communicators, but I never ... The problem is, in war, and you see it now, the military is a pyramid system with a general on top and a private on the bottom. And the guys at the top, they take one general, and there may be a hundred of them, but only one general goes, you know. Or two colonels go. So it's everybody fightin' to get that job. It's just hard to do.

TINKER: And lot of people are wanting to do it, too, because they know it'll help them get promoted. 'Cause you gotta have stuff like that.

EDMANDS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. You spend your whole life in the military preparing for war. It's like the football game: you practice all week, [and] you wanna play Saturday, you know.

TINKER: Well, I know. (Laughs)

HESSLER: I was gonna ask. See, I don't have much experience with the military and, you know, to me, I would think maybe I wanna stay out of war because ...

EDMANDS: No, shoot no.

HESSLER: But that's your retribution.

EDMANDS: Vietnam was a different war. Vietnam was a war that, uh ... the US military people went over there and tried their darnedest to win it, but nobody wanted to do it. I mean it's like, if you call me and send me, I'm gonna be the best troop that ever went over, but I don't want to go. It's just that kind of mindset. But now it's different. You do Desert Storm or Iraqi Freedom or whatever it is now, it's put me in coach. I wanna go.

TINKER: Mm hmm

EDMANDS: But you have that feeling now that you're goin' to fight in a real war, not like Vietnam, where they tied your hands and had all these rules of engagement that you couldn't do all these things. And it's just a miserable situation. But now you can go fight in a real war. And I dare say they don't have a problem gettin' people to go. My son, who is a civilian, he's never been in the military. He works for a military contractor. He's been to Afghanistan a couple times already, and loves it.

TINKER: Oh, has he?

EDMANDS: Yeah, they take him over as a contractor. He identifies people, you know. He's one of the top twenty-five fingerprint experts in the country now because of his training. But he's doin' all that stuff—lookin' in eyes and the fingerprints and all that.

TINKER: Oh, really? How did he get that training?

EDMANDS: The company did it. He was a policeman in Georgia, and they hired him. He's up in Virginia. The company hired him, took him and gave him all that training. He loves it. I talk to him, and man he loves it. Dagumm it, you get to go and you're a civilian and I'm in the military and can't go, so. (Laughs)

TINKER: So then from Brunswick you went to Andrews. That was after Desert Storm.

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: Now is this a similar base, the 231st Combat Communications Squadron? Is that similar to [your unit in] Brunswick?

EDMANDS: Every one of the units I was in, until the last one, were the same type [of] unit, combat-com. And when I was in Georgia and Florida, they were joint communications support squadrons, but if you saw them you wouldn't know the difference between the two. They look the same. So, all the units I was in throughout [my military career] were that same type of combat-com unit.

TINKER: Okay.



EDMANDS: And when I went to Andrews, it was just another one of ‘em. Look at the numbers. I was in McGhee-Tyson 228<sup>th</sup>. Then I went to Florida, I was [in the] 231<sup>st</sup>. I went to Brunswick, I was 224. Now I go up there, I’m 231<sup>st</sup>. They’re all in that mix of combat-com units.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: But what happened is they fired the commander at Andrews. And, uh, General Davis, up there—they called down and wanted to know if I wanted the job with what happened with the colonel up there. General Davis told them, and they called down and said, “Are you interested?” And I said, “Yes sir, I’ll be there in the morning.” I learned to do that. “Yes sir, I can be there tomorrow morning.”

TINKER: Yeah. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: And they said, “Okay, we’re going to do interviews.” And so, I was gonna fly up there on my own nickel, and they said, “No, don’t do that.” And I guess they looked at resumes and saw I had it hands down. But I didn’t know that. So, I was here at a ball game. You know, I was stationed down in Georgia and we came up to the ball game. And, so, they all left the house and went over to UT to the ball game. And I stayed there, and they called me on the phone, the board did, and I did, uh, a forty-five minute interview on the phone.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: But they told me later that the questions I asked them just blew the board away. They said, “You had the job and we hadn’t talked the other seven.” [They] said, “You just absolutely blew us away with the ques—And man, I’m asking things about budgets, and support, and man power, and mission, and, uh, you know. And I bet all that ... The guy that asked me the technical question [was] a colonel [who] is a civilian. He worked for the government in HF [high frequency] radio communications. He’s the guru for the whole government, like a scientist. And he says, “Tell me what you know about ground communications.” Well, man, did I just nail that. (Laughs) That’s simple for me. And I bet none of the rest of them could even answer the question.

TINKER: Probably.

EDMANDS: And they said—the general told me afterward, “You just blew us out of the water.”

TINKER: Were you excited to go to Andrews?

EDMANDS: Oh, absolutely.

TINKER: Kind of be near D.C. and all that?

EDMANDS: Oh, yeah. Well, I learned in the military, assignments [are] what you make of it. By the time I got there all the places I lived and been, it’s—you know, I’ll tell ya something. I’ve

never had a bad assignment. I've had some I've enjoyed more than others, [but] I've never had a bad one. And it's what you make out of it.

TINKER: Did you ever get to go on Air Force One?

EDMANDS: No, I saw it all the time when I was over there. But no, I never got close to it.

TINKER: (Laughs) But you never got to sneak a peek.

EDMANDS: My motor sergeant's, who was a female, husband worked on it.

TINKER: Oh, really?

EDMANDS: Well, I heard all kinds of stories over there at the 89<sup>th</sup> Wing, or whatever that was that did all that.

TINKER: Really? Like what?

EDMANDS: Oh, yeah. They start, uh ...

TINKER: Because I used to think about that when I was when in maintenance. I'd think, "Oh, what would it be like to be on the crew for the Air Force One."

EDMANDS: Yeah. What's, uh, do you remember a Madame Albright? That must be her name, right?

TINKER: Yeah, Madeleine Albright.

EDMANDS: The Secretary of State or something. Every time she got on the plane, [whether] it was Air Force One, Air Force Two, or all that whole—they have a whole group of planes they fly. With her, every time she got on the airplane, soon as she got on board, they gave her a warm glass of milk. And, uh, Al Gore—you know when a jet takes off it does this. (Gestures with hands) You've been on jets. [So you know] when they take off, they do this.

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: Al Gore would get a tray table and, when it [the jet] did like that, he'd ride the tray table like he was surfin' down the center aisle. [Let's] see, what else. Hillary ... um, they did not like the military. The Clintons did not like the military, and when he first went into office, somebody showed up at the White House in uniform and they said, "Don't ever do that again. You don't ever come here in uniform." The Clintons told him that. But, uh, one of the stories about them is they came back from some place and Hillary and Bill are standing on the top of the steps [of Air Force One] and Chelsea came down the steps to the bottom. And if you know, there's two E9s (Armed Forces pay grade) standing there at attention, and she came down to the bottom of the steps and started talking to the E9s, just casual conversation. And when her mother

came down, her mother says, “I have told you over and over, don’t you ever talk to those people.” Yeah. And I’ve forgotten as many stories as I could tell you, but I mean it just ...

TINKER: Oh, I’m sure. I’m sure. ... I went to the Air Force Museum—have you ever been up there to Dayton?

EDMANDS: Oh, yeah. I was just up there in the past year.

TINKER: Because they’ve got the old Air Force Ones there. Like the one Truman [flew in]. I think they’ve got—did Truman and Eisenhower, were they on the same one?

EDMANDS: No, I think they were different.

TINKER: [I] think they had different ones, yeah.

EDMANDS: Truman had the “Sacred Cow” or something.

TINKER: Truman’s was just like an old C-46.

EDMANDS: It was a DC-6. I think it was like a DC-6.

TINKER: It wasn’t that great, let’s just put it that way.

EDMANDS: Eisenhower[’s] was like the Super Connie [Super Constellation], the three tail. And by the time we got to Kennedy, it was the 707.

TINKER: Yeah. That Air Force Museum ... You need like three days to get through everything there. You cannot do it all in one day.

EDMANDS: You know it’s made up four, like, hangars. Or three ... side by side. They’re now breaking ground for another one because they’ve got all those aircraft they can’t display.

TINKER: I mean, that is an amazing place.

EDMANDS: Oh, yeah. It’s the best in the world. It is.

TINKER: It really is. I can’t recommend it enough. Well, do you want to tell us about your time at Tyndall [Air Force Base in Florida] and then kind of what happened at 9/11?

EDMANDS: Well, do you want to talk about Andrews or do you wanna ...

TINKER: Oh yeah. I didn’t know if you wanted to tell us about any of your missions there or...

EDMANDS: Well, Andrews ... Probably the missions to talk about is to go back to when I was in Brunswick. I don’t know, I think all the missions I ever did I got done by the time I left Brunswick. There never was any great stuff after that in my career. But when I went into

Andrews, the unit was a mess. They had fired the commander and they were six months away from an Operational Readiness Inspection, an ORI. And the unit was in shambles. And, so, the general hired me. I went up to see the general and he says, “You need to get that unit fixed and pass this inspection in six months.” [I answered,] “Yes sir.” You know, I said when I was there, every time I turn over a rock and someone’d put the rock back, there’s something under it. I mean just unbelievable stuff. I had a guy that had wrecked a military vehicle, and they had hid it. He was drunk.

HESSLER: They hid the vehicle? Like it never happened.

EDMANDS: Yeah, yeah, they hid vehicle and then they ordered parts against other vehicles over a period of time and fixed it. The guy that was commander was running a real estate agency out his office there. It’s just ... I mean just unbelievable ...

TINKER: That’s at Andrews Air Force Base?

EDMANDS: Yes. The guy that was over maintenance was a dope head. I kicked him out, he busted positive on cocaine. The guy, he wasn’t even an electronic mechanic and he was over because he rented from the commander—he rented an apartment from the commander. I mean just ... it was just unbelievable, it was just absolutely unbelievable what I ran into, and I just started wading into it, trying to do adult things to solve problems. I remember one day two tech sergeants come in and sit down. The proverbial black book, they pulled it out and started reading to me all the things people had done.

TINKER: Oh, they’d kind of been keeping track.

EDMANDS: Yeah, they’d been keeping—yeah, you know you always hear the black book. They came and sat down in my office, and they started ...

TINKER: They were waiting for the day when they got a new commander.

EDMANDS: That’s right. And I said to ‘em, I said, “What am I gonna do?” I’m sitting there thinking, “God, what am I gonna do?” I said, “You two are NCOs. It is your responsibility to report that. Now you get up go right across the street to the IG [Inspector General] and report it. Don’t tell me about it.” Well, they didn’t go. They went back to their section and that was the end of it. (Laughs) But, uh ...

TINKER: You probably couldn’t’ve handled everything they had in their little black book.

EDMANDS: Well, I couldn’t. I couldn’t. It’s just unbelievable. So, finally, we got down and went to the ORI and we flunked it. We got a marginal, and we were lucky to get that. Basically anything below a satisfactory is a failure. And so they tell the commander first. So, the IG team told me, “You got a marginal, and you’ve flunked.” And I immediately went and got the phone, and I called the general. And I said, “Sir, flunked it. Got a marginal.” And he said to me, before I went out the door, he said, “You going to pass this?” And I said, “I don’t think so. But, I’ll do my best.” When I called him and said we flunked it, he said, “Colonel Edmands, you told me to

expect that. Not a problem. Go get it fixed,” [and he] hung up. And I had his total support, 100 percent. I couldn’t believe that. Wow. And we went back, a year later, and redid that inspection and set the record for the Air Force in circuit activation. Because ’94 we flunked, ’95 we did that, and for the year of ’95 we won the mission support trophy, which is the number one unit in the entire United States, and there’s 600 units eligible for that award.

TINKER: That’s excellent. Wow.

EDMANDS: One out of 600.

HESSLER: You had the right kind of support.

EDMANDS: A year later—I was really proud of those folks. But, you know, what they needed was leadership. Smart people, they just didn’t have—this yahoo that was commander—they just didn’t have leadership. And it was funny ‘cause they’d come in my office and say, “What do you want to me to do about this?” And I’d say, “You see those tech sergeant sleeves. You’re in charge. Go do it, it’s what I’m paying you for.” And boy, you start talking about turning things around. Boy, you see everybody with a high step, and smilin’, and bein’ in charge, and makin’ things happen and ...

TINKER: That’s ... an accomplishment. I mean, that’s ... I bet you're proud of that.

EDMANDS: Yeah, it is. I’m very proud of those people. And then after I left, they closed the dang unit.

TINKER: They did?

EDMANDS: Yep, took the flag down.

TINKER: Oh, the cut backs.

EDMANDS: Took the flag down. (Laughs)

TINKER: That’s really—cut backs. (Laughs) Um, I got out in ’92 and they were already startin’ to cut some then. You know, right after Desert Storm, I ...noticed, you could feel it, the cuts.

EDMANDS: Yep. Well, you’re gonna see it now big time. I don’t think we’ve ever seen anything like we’re fixin’ to see.

TINKER: No, you’re right about that. But we won’t get into that will we. (Laughs) I’ll have to edit that, too. If I start talkin’ about that ...

EDMANDS: But, I tell you what. We got into a lot of little things that we’re just—the people loved it because, you know, most commanders will sit there and you do what were supposed to do and otherwise keep your head down. I’m—I drive a train, man. I go look for things. I

remember one time Air Force One couldn't fly because they had some crypto cable they didn't have. And we got it and ran it over there to them. I used to do the funerals at Arlington. When they'd have a fly over, I'd send my air traffic control people out to radio, and they'd conduct that, control the airplane flyin' over for the funeral. You know, just lot of little things like that. We worked with FBI one time. They did a terrorist drill, and we went down and participated in that.

TINKER: See, now stuff like that's great for morale.

EDMANDS: Oh, absolutely, people loved it. And although you're working them to death, they're not complaining. They're lovin' it, you know. And it's good ...

TINKER: 'Cause when you feel like you're part of something bigger that's ...

EDMANDS: Absolutely. You're not sitting around, that you're actually part of something.

TINKER: Yeah, that's great for morale.

EDMANDS: Yeah, and you know, this thing now with the Red Tails and this new movie and stuff. I went up and was bartender for their convention in D.C. one time.

TINKER: Oh, you did?

EDMANDS: Yeah, met all of 'em. Served drinks. Yeah.

TINKER: I've met a few of them. That's a pretty good movie. It's alright.

EDMANDS: I haven't seen it yet. I gotta go see it.

TINKER: It was pretty good. 'Course, you know, there's always a lot of criticism about military movies, and, you know, it's never the way it really was ... and I always say, "Well you know, it's a movie. They can only do so much."

EDMANDS: Yeah. (Laughter)

TINKER: So, how long were you at Andrews for five years?

EDMANDS: I was there five years.

TINKER: And then, they shut it down right after you left?

EDMANDS: Yeah, well, probably two years after I left or something then. Pulled the plug on 'em.

TINKER: Okay. That always makes you sad.

EDMANDS: But, it was a bill payer and what that means is they were gonna cut the flying unit.

TINKER: Oh, oh, yeah.

EDMANDS: They were gonna cut billets out of the flyin' unit. And the general says, "We'll give this unit up if you won't take the billets from the flying unit." So, that's called a bill payer. They closed the unit I was in and ...

TINKER: It's a trade, a tradeoff.

EDMANDS: Yeah, exactly what they did.

TINKER: Well how did you end up at Tyndall from there?

EDMANDS: Well, again, I applied for a job. It was the A6, which is over communications for 1st Air Force down there. And I went down there and interviewed with the general, Larry Arnold, and didn't get the job and came home with [my] tail between my legs and said, "Oh, woe is me." And then all of sudden, out of the clear blue, I get this call. And he says, "Are you still interested in comin' down here?" And I said, "Absolutely." And he said, "Well, we just fired a commander, and I need somebody in a hurry." [I] said, "Alright, I'll be down there just as quick as I can get down there." And so ...

TINKER: Everything just seemed to always be in place for you.

EDMANDS: That's what I'm tellin' you. I sit back and look at my career, and, every time, somebody had a problem. But, every job I applied for and tried to get, I didn't get it.

TINKER: Right, but then something would happen.

EDMANDS: Yep, something would happen, and they'd call me. Yeah, and the problem was, and I'll tell ya, [it was] kind of sensitive issue. I can talk to you here about it up and up, but, uh, probably half the unit at Andrews was black. Bein' in Washington D.C., well, you know, no big deal. But the problem that got the commander fired at Tyndall was a black major. And she did some things that he didn't respond to and had gotten him fired. And, so, guess what; they're looking around [for] somebody to come down there that could handle that problem. Well, guess what. There's Edmands, that's ... turned a unit around that's half black and goin' great guns. And, so, that resume got me the next step. And long story short, down there, I simply went down there to her and said, "Here's your job, and I expect you to do it." She didn't want to do it. You know, it was one of those things. I said, "I expect you to be at your desk. I expect you to be doin' this." And, uh, basically she didn't wanna do it. She wanted to do what she wanted to do. And nobody had ever held her down to it. And by the time she's a major and down there, she's just runnin' rough shod over everybody. I walked in the door and said, "That's what you're doin'", end of conversation." And so she quit. Couldn't do what she wanted to, [so] she asked to retire, to quit.

TINKER: She didn't want the accountability.

EDMANDS: And I went to the vice commander, the brigadier general of 1<sup>st</sup> Air Force, and told him. And the poor guy turned white as a sheep, scared him to death. He thought, “Oh, man, here we go. We got all these minority complaints and everything.” He says, “Oh, get her over here, get her over here, get her over here.” She came over, and he went in an office, behind closed doors. And he said, “Are you, you know, you okay with this? You really wanna leave?” She left. [She] said, “No, I wanna go.” And [she] left.

TINKER: I guess she couldn’t say much about just you saying I want you to do your job.

EDMANDS: That’s right. I’m paying you to do this. Do it.

TINKER: Holding people accountable.

EDMANDS: So, when she had somebody to do that to her, she [said,] “I’m outta here, man. I wanna do what I wanna do.”

TINKER: Yeah. Some people respond to that leadership. Most people do, I should say. I think most people do, when they have structure, discipline, and leadership.

EDMANDS: Well that’s what the military’s about. That’s what the military’s about is the group, doing everything as a team, no individuals.

TINKER: Um, so, explain the difference between ... the 702<sup>nd</sup> Computer Systems Squadron. Now, that’s not combat communications.

EDMANDS: No. No, my job there was ...

TINKER: This is something totally different.

EDMANDS: ... is software. My unit wrote and maintained the software for their defense system, for NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command]. And so, to visualize this, there’s one half million lines of code in this program, and it’s full. The computer is 1980 and I got more memory in that watch than that system had, that huge system, seriously, than that huge system had. So, what happens [is] you can’t put any more code into the system. So, you come to me as an operator and say, “On my radar console when I push this button, I want it to show altitude and speed on the screen.” So we go in there and write code to that. But, first off, I can’t do it ‘cause there’s no room for any more code. So my guys are constantly going over ...one half million lines, looking for maybe two lines of code they can pull out and put one to replace it, to make room.

TINKER: That sounds horrible!

HESSLER: Like a formatting type thing, yeah.

EDMANDS: Yeah, exactly, that’s what they did.



TINKER: That sounds horrible! I'm in pain just hearing that.

EDMANDS: I had seventy-five people and most of them were software engineers, and that's what they did. And then, we would issue a ... you know, if you've got Microsoft and they issue updates and you get 'em and download them, we'd do that about every six months, and they'd go out to the field. And so I would make a new one, send it out to you in the field. You would load this into the system. Uh, and we had a system at Tyndall. We had one at Roane, New York, and we had one at, uh, Seattle, McChord Air Force Base, and Alaska, at Elmendorf, we had one. So we had four of them. And so—no, wait a minute, I left the Canadians out at, uh, their equivalent of our—Cheyenne Mountain is a whole 600 feet down in the ground in central Canada. And they two systems down there, so I guess I had, what, five, six, whatever it was. And, so, we'd write these things, and we'd test it. You don't just write it. I had a whole mock up in my unit, and we'd put it on there, and we'd run it to make sure it ran. I'd have operators come in and sit down and control airplanes and stuff or do whatever to make sure that it ran okay. And then we'd ship it to the field.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: And it'd get out in the field, and they'd load it wrong and screw everything up, and the system would go down, and everybody be hollarin', so what I did was I changed. And I said, when we issue a release, my folks take it out and load it. So that's what we did, and I'd have a two [member] team of software engineers carry it out to Alaska or Seattle or wherever, and they'd go out and load the new software on the system.

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: It doesn't sound like much, but it's very complicated and involved. And then we decided ...

TINKER: It's actually mind-boggling to me because I ... just can't relate to that. I mean it's so ... (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Yeah. Then the powers that be decided that we needed a software program. So I went to Europe, and coordinated with a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] unit identical to mine that did the software for the NATO air defense system. So then we sent six or eight people over there all the time and they're over there writin' software after a system—they took their system software and they're updatin' it to make it work on ... So, we're right in the middle of this thing. We've now got it up; we're demonstratin' it; we're gettin' it near finished, and 9/11 happens.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

EDMANDS: And, so, one of the things that happened on 9/11 is the control for the entire system is at Tyndall. Okay. The air defense center is at Tyndall. Rome, New York is seein' what's going on because it's in their upper OAR, Operations Area. The problem is they have no

radars hooked into their systems. Everything is, uh ... transponder. Do you know what transponder is?

TINKER: Mm hmm.

EDMANDS: On an airplane, do you know what transponder is?

HESSLER: No, not exactly.

EDMANDS: Okay. Every airplane in the air has a radio that sends out a signal. That's called a transponder.

HESSLER: Okay, like a beacon type.

EDMANDS: Right. And it tells—when you get in the cockpit to take off, you got a number. And you put that number in and you turn the transponder on. So when you're flyin', it's sending the FAA [Federal Aviation Agency] a thing that says: direction, altitude, speed, all those little electronic blips goin' off.

HESSLER: And your number.

EDMANDS: And when they pull up the screen that's what they see. They don't got a radar goin' around and paintin' like [in] an old movie, that little square up there. And they're seein' what your sendin' them. Well, the terrorists were smart enough when they got in the cockpit, [they] flipped off the transponder, which now we've got nothing on the screen. We had no idea where they were, and that's how they got us. They're flying around [and] we had no idea [where they were]. Blind. And, so, after 9/11 they dumped a ton of money into it. They tied all—there were radars there, they weren't tied into our system. Now they got a brand new system, all the radars are tied in and everything. So it can't happen again, not like they did before. But that's what happened.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: We were right in the middle of doin' ...

TINKER: Of ... new software.

EDMANDS: Finally puttin' that together for a new system and they just dumped money in ... Thales? Is that the name? Out of Long Beach? Or somebody built the system they have now.

TINKER: Oh, really?

EDMANDS: They just chunked that. All that worked we'd done and everything, they just threw it away and went and bought a whole brand new system.

TINKER: Started all over.

EDMANDS: Had the money. See, before they didn't have the money to do that.

TINKER: Oh, so ... they just went and bought a system?

EDMANDS: Yeah, after 9/11, money fell out like the bank vault door fell down.

TINKER: But, before you all were havin' to build it up from ...

EDMANDS: Tryin' to build a new system. We had the old system, but from 1980. But, we were taking something NATO had ...

TINKER: Wow. Yeah. Trying to create a new one.

EDMANDS: ... and trying to create a new system that—See, if we wrote all that and maintained it, then we're not paying somebody to do that, and that saves millions of dollars. And then ...

TINKER: But now they bought one and are paying for the maintenance of it.

EDMANDS: Yeah. The money came out like crazy.

TINKER: Isn't that somethin'. Well, where were you when 9/11 happened?

EDMANDS: Uh, at was Tyndall. I was at work. My wife called me. Uh, I always went into work and, in my career, I always was the first one at work. I'm one of them kind of guys. I always went in early, carried the morning paper, [and] sat there and read it while everybody else was comin' in. I was at work and, uh ... I picked up the phone, and she said, "A plane flew into the World Trade Center, and it's on TV." So I hung up. And I'm thinkin', "Well, it's, you know, a single engine Cessna or something." So, I walk across the hall where there's a TV and some of my people are already standin' there watchin'. And while I'm standing there watching it, the second airliner hit the second Trade tower and I said, "That's no accident." I went back in my office, got my line badge, which is a secure badge, and clipped it on and went down the street and went in the air operations center. And they had, uh—air operations center is tiered, like different levels all the way down. And, so, General Arnold sits at the middle and the very top—he's the commander—and his staff, and then everybody's ... and the last guy in there is probably a staff sergeant.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: So, all the way down, TVs all around the room, radar returns or the watching stuff. [I] went in there, went up, and stood behind General Arnold because I had no mission at that point. And, in fact, later on that day the three star [general] at NORAD called me and said—and he's a Canadian general. By the way, I didn't mention that: I had Canadians in my unit. That's why it says NORAD System Support Facility [the 702<sup>nd</sup>], also.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

EDMANDS: That's the Canadian portion of it. I had, like, twenty Canadians workin' for me. A lieutenant colonel, a major on down, and software engineer. But my boss at NORAD was a three star Canadian general for operations. And he called and said, "Hands off the system." In other words, he didn't want us doin' anything that might bring one of 'em [radar systems] down that morning. So, we basically closed up shop and I ended up taking everybody in the unit and making guards out of 'em by nightfall because of what happened. But, anyway, I went down there and stood behind General Arnold in case he needed me for somethin' and spent the morning down there like a fly on the wall watchin' everything. And they're sitting there trying to figure out what's going on, find where these airplanes are. They launched some planes out of, uh, Otis [Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts], the F-15s. Of course, they got to New York too late to do anything. And they launched the planes out of, uh, Langley, F-16s, to go find [United Flight] 93 because they knew it would be coming back to Washington. And, uh, the passengers took over and crashed it into the ground before they could get up in that area. But again, they had no radar return. They're [F-16s] flying blind and they ... [were] looking for an airplane in the blind.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: And the Andrews' unit, where I was, had F-16s. And they launched them downtown lookin' for [American Airlines Flight] 77—or right after 77 crashed, they launched them downtown lookin' for 93.

TINKER: Hmm.

EDMANDS: But, you know, all these—what do you call them? All these people on the computer and TV that talk about what happened and all the conspiracy theories and everything. Man, I stood right in the middle of it and that's all a bunch of B.S., every bit of it. I stood right in the middle of that and saw the best people we got in the world tryin' to solve that problem.

TINKER: Figure out what's going on.

EDMANDS: Yep, tryin' to figure out and solve that problem.

TINKER: Hmm. Did ... all that have any ... I mean, what made you decide to—well, before I get to that, can you talk more about working with the Canadians and how that's all set up.

EDMANDS: Oh, let me tell you about the Canadians. Greatest people you'll ever work with. If you're in the service, you know how somebody needs somebody to volunteer to do something, everybody does this (makes gasping sound) in America. Every Canadian hand'd go up. Just the difference. Every Canadian hand'd go up. "Yeah, I'll do it, sir! I'll do it! I wanna dig a ditch! I'll do it, sir!" (Laughs)

TINKER: You had Canadians working for you and your commander was Canadian?

EDMANDS: Yeah. The Vice Commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Air Force was a brigadier general Canadian. In fact, the guy I worked for is now a three star and he was in charge of NATO, of over all the planes that were bombing Libya—Bouchard, General [Charles] Bouchard. Yeah.

TINKER: Oh, wow!

EDMANDS: Yep, that's guy I worked for. And to sidetrack a minute, you know about this French thing in Canada, where there's people in Canada pushing that they should speak French and not English? Their officers that rise up all have to speak two languages. And every time he got up and did something, he did it in French and he did it in English. And my wife used to love to go to things where he was. (Laugh) 'Cause she said, "I just love to hear him talk French." And he'd get up and every speech he gave, everything out his mouth, if he was in the group, he'd do it in French and do it in English.

TINKER: Huh, that's interesting.

EDMANDS: But yeah, he was the vice commander and General Arnold was commander. He was American. And then down in my unit, like I said, I had about seventy-five people and about twenty of them were Canadians. And my vice commander was Canadian, [a] lieutenant colonel. And he was a vice commander. Very, very good people. Can't say enough about 'em. And we went up—I'll tell you something funny. In the United States, you go in an air operations center, the control center, where they're doing the airplanes. Man, that's all classified; you don't get in there without line badges and escorts. We go to Canada, and they said to me, uh ... the Canadian, my lieutenant colonel took us up there to go in their equivalent of Cheyenne Mountain—he said, "Bring the wives. You know, buy them an airplane ticket, bring 'em along. They'll enjoy this." So I took my wife. Well, we go out to their Cheyenne Mountain place, and like I said, it's 600 feet underground. [The Canadians] put 'em on a bus and they take 'em down there and they take 'em in the center! And I'm saying (Laughs), "I can't believe this! This is a classified center and they just drug the wives around in there, and they sat through the briefings and everything." No big deal. (Laughs)

TINKER: Well ...

EDMANDS: [I] couldn't believe it. Told my wife, said, "You'd never do that in the States, man!" But, oh, they—you know, and they're so proud of their country and they wanna show you everything and do everything for you. It's just real ...

TINKER: I guess it's just I never really thought about the whole NORAD setup and how intertwined we are with the Canadian military that way.

EDMANDS: Yeah. Yeah. Well, NORAD is [the] U.S. and Canada.

TINKER: I know. I just never ...

EDMANDS: Yeah, it's [the] U.S. and Canada.

TINKER: Is it funded equally by the ...

EDMANDS: No, the U.S. funds most of it. Canada can't afford it. Canada's not that rich a country. In fact, when they bought the new system, they, uh ... I might tell ya the numbers right, but we needed six and they bought seven. And I said, uh, [to] somebody I was talking to—this was after I got out—I said, “Why did they buy seven?” And they said, “Well, uh, the deal is after they get ‘em, they’re gonna give one to Canada.”

TINKER: Yeah. Okay.

EDMANDS: But, they can't say that up front, [that] they're just gonna buy seven and say, “Oh, we got an extra one. Let's just give it to Canada.”

TINKER: Okay, I figured it was something like that.

EDMANDS: Good people. I'll tell you what, I can't say enough about them. Good, good people. Loved working with them.

TINKER: That's wonderful.

EDMANDS: And they all loved Panama City, and they all wanted to stay there when they got there. (Laughter) And they're poor people. They're pay is way low. And Lord knows that's an overseas assignment, and Panama City's not cheap. And uh ...

TINKER: Most of your career, during this time, the '80s and '90s, were you living on base? Or did you live off base?

EDMANDS: I never lived on base in my career.

TINKER: So you lived off base.

EDMANDS: I always lived off base and I'll tell you why. They give you—well, you know this—they give you, uh, [a] housing allowance, and it's non-taxable. So that's a no-brainer. I bought a house everywhere I lived.

TINKER: Really?

EDMANDS: When I got—the last year of my retirement, I owned four houses. Let me tell ya what I did. I get down to the month before I get out, I sold the one in Washington [D.C] and made nearly 200,000 dollars on it. I've since sold the one I had in Georgia and the one I had here, an owner-financed. I owned them outright. I got 'em paid off in ... so I got the residual of that coming in [every] month. And I was able to take the 200 [thousand dollars] and pay off my lot and build my house at Tellico Lake and stuff. So, financial wise, that worked out gangbusters. But I never sold a house [until I retired].

TINKER: Because you just basically investing everywhere you went by buying the property.

EDMANDS: Yep ... surely did. I would go into a place, go buy a house, find a house and buy it. And then when I left, [I would] turn it into rental property. And uh ...

TINKER: That's a smart thing to do.

EDMANDS: My rental house in Maryville, I left in '84 and I sold it probably [in] 2006 or something. But [in] that twenty plus years, [only] one month I didn't get rent.

TINKER: Just one month?

EDMANDS: In twenty-six years, yeah ... twenty-two years.

HESSLER: I'd say that property value went up pretty well, too, being down in Blount County.

EDMANDS: I didn't know. I did not have—the one in D.C. was unbelievable. The other two, the property stayed ... very little, you know, it went up, but it wasn't anything gangbuster. The one in D.C., I paid like 178 [thousand], and when I left, I tried to sell it for 199 and couldn't get a bite, so I turned into rental property. I didn't want rental property in D.C. and finally said, "Oh, to heck with it," and turned into rental property.

TINKER: Right.

EDMANDS: And never had a problem rentin' it. That worked out just fine for five years. Had a couple of long-term renters. But lo and behold, the market took off. I mean just went gangbusters in D.C. And I had paid down where I owed about a hundred [thousand] on it. The real estate agent up there called me and said, "You wanna sell that house yet?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm down to the last month or two in the service. I need to sell it. List it. I can't do anything with it." He said, "I'm gonna list at 285 [thousand]." He called me back in forty-eight hours. [and] He had a bid for 290 and 300.

TINKER: Wow.

EDMANDS: And I had listed [it at] 285. They were higher than what I'd listed. And I said, we'll take the 300, of course.

TINKER: That's a good investment. Smart thing to do.

EDMANDS: Let me tell you what. That's a blind hog findin' an acorn 'cause I had never expected anything like that to happen. I thought I was gonna lose money on it: I couldn't sell it; I couldn't get anybody to talk about it...

TINKER: ... And you just didn't want to live on base, right?

EDMANDS: Well, no, it was a financial thing. I've always invested. I looked at that [like] why live on base with all that hassle, when I can live off base? I mean, when I was in Andrews, they were giving me like two thousand[dollars] a month, un-taxable. I mean, that's just a no-brainer.

TINKER: What made you decide to retire in '03?

EDMANDS: Had to.

TINKER: You had to?

EDMANDS: Ran out of time.

TINKER: So you maxed out your time?

EDMANDS: I maxed out. When you're an officer, there's a maximum amount of time you can serve. And for lieutenant colonels [it is] twenty-eight years and the colonels thirty years. Generals are the only ones who can go any further.

TINKER: Okay, and that includes your time as an enlisted?

EDMANDS: No. Officer time.

TINKER: It didn't ... Oh, just officer time?

EDMANDS: They call it MSD, Military Service Dates. So, they went on a military service date of when I was commissioned. And I was commissioned in October '73. So thirty years later, I retired 1 October 2003.

TINKER: Oh, okay. That's a long career. That's something to be proud of.

EDMANDS: Well, let me tell you something. Lookin' back—and not every day was fun day, I promise ya there were bumps in the road—but lookin' back, I had career I loved. I enjoyed getting' up every morning and going to work and a lot of people can't say that. I really do.

HESSLER: It's hard to find.

EDMANDS: Yeah.

TINKER: I try to tell people now, the military, it's a great way of life.

EDMANDS: Well, it is. It absolutely is.

TINKER: And if you're young, just startin' out in life, it gets you a good start in life. Even if you don't want to make a career of it, it's a great start in life. I would never take back my time, for anything.



EDMANDS: Yeah, a lady told me the other day, [she] said, “My son’s going off to basic training in the Marines.” And I said, “We ain’t gonna send a kid back to you. You’re gonna get an adult back.” And I said, “You tell me after he comes back what you got.”

TINKER: Yeah, that’s true. Well, uh, Lee was there anything you wanted to ask him about?

HESSLER: I can’t think of anything off hand.

TINKER: (Laughs) ... I had Lee doing some research before this, so he’s been reading up on the ... He already knew about the—didn’t you already know about the ditty bop [Morse code operator] and all that? (Laughs)

HESSLER: Yeah, I looked online, looked at the radar array that was out there at Elmendorf, that huge ...

EDMANDS: Right. Oh, did you see a picture of it?

HESSLER: Yeah, I did actually. And I also saw that a lot of the people that were on base there, they kept in touch after that. [I] saw a lot of that online.

EDMANDS: I’ve tried to get in touch with some of those folks, but I’ve never worked it out. But the unit I was in had a thousand people.

TINKER: Yeah. Well, that’s a good point. Have you joined any veteran’s associations?

EDMANDS: Oh, I’m in everything. Yeah, I’m in everything. But I haven’t really run across—the few people I had knew here in Knoxville or the few people I knew in the service, you know, [I] keep in touch with on email but ...

TINKER: But, like ... the American Legion and, you belong to all that?

EDMANDS: Yeah, well, I’m in it, but there’s nobody in that I was in the service with.

TINKER: Yeah. But you don’t go to like—you’re group doesn’t have reunions or anything like that?

EDMANDS: No. None of ‘em I was ever in—well, I take that back. The JCSE does. And they do it about every year now, and I went down to one, [but] didn’t know anybody. I mean the unit is so big and people, you know, on the active duty unit is changing out every three years. I mean, you’re talking about tens of thousands of people and when you ...

TINKER: So you didn’t go back anymore after that?

EDMANDS: No, I didn’t know anybody. I get the newsletter and everything, but, you know, seldom do I ever see a name on there that I even know who they are.

TINKER: Hmm.

EDMANDS: There's so many people through there that ...

TINKER: Well, what did you do when you go out, when you retired? Besides—did you come back to Knoxville?

EDMANDS: Well, see that was the deal. I always intended to come back to Knoxville. That was always the deal. And when I got married to my wife in Georgia, I said, "When I retire I'm going to Knoxville. And if you don't wanna do that, don't get married 'Cause that's what we're doing." So, when I got my last assignment at Tyndall, and I knew that would be the last assignment, we started making trips up here looking for property. And we started in Knoxville and worked our way south.

TINKER: Okay.

EDMANDS: And over a period time, we finally ran into the Kahite part of Tellico Village and said that's it. You know, you look so long and one day you just walk past and [think] "That's it, that's what we're looking for."

TINKER: That's nice.

EDMANDS: So, [I] bought the property. And then when I retired built ...

TINKER: That's nice. I love to hear stories where people, like, plan these things out. (Laughs)

EDMANDS: Oh, I had it all planned. I am a planner. I don't—my wife's the total opposite. You know, she runs helter-skelter. But I'm one of those people where, you know, everything is planned out exactly how I'm gonna do it, when I'm gonna do it.

TINKER: So, when you built there, um, did you ... think you might want work part time somewhere ...

EDMANDS: No, never wanted to do anything like that.

TINKER: ... or volunteer, or ...

EDMANDS: Well, I'm doing that unbelievable. I'm doing too much of that. I'm way overboard on that. It's like having a full-time job, but ...

TINKER: Everybody's—a lot of people have told me that they're busier after they retire ...

EDMANDS: Oh, I am. Absolutely. Absolutely.

TINKER: ... than when they were working.

EDMANDS: I sit there at my desk at home a full day working on stuff for different organizations. It's like going to work. Go downstairs, sit down at a computer, and work all day, you know. It's all volunteer [work]. But the beauty of it is [I] don't have to. I do it and enjoy it, but I don't have to do it, you know.

TINKER: Yeah. Like what are some of the organizations you're helping out?

EDMANDS: Well, let me see. I'm uh—Kiwanis ...

TINKER: Or the main ones?

EDMANDS: Kiwanis, now I've been president of it in the past and I'm on the board. And I got in the water organization, the Watershed Association of the Tellico Reservoir. I got in it. I spent four years in it, and I was secretary, vice president, president, vice president. See, somehow I gravitate to that. I wanna sit on the back row. I got in the Coast Guard Auxiliary and said maybe I learn something about boating. And now I'm the division commander over East Tennessee. You know, that's the story of my life. I got in the Red Cross and was in for it a while and, uh, did that. The Sons of the American Revolution, I was president and did all that and finally got away from it an arm's length some, and now they've talked me into being the district president or something. I got a brand new job with that, so ...

HESSLER: Do you do any work with the Boy Scouts?

EDMANDS: No, and I've done that purpose 'cause I know if I get around 'em ...

HESSLER: It's a lot of time.

EDMANDS: If I get around 'em, I'm gonna be up to here in Boy Scouts. And I just ... I get chewed out at home every day.

TINKER: 'Cause you're too busy?

EDMANDS: That's right.

TINKER: Yeah. You're supposed to be retired.

EDMANDS: Mary must be sittin' there. (Laughter)

TINKER: No, I hadn't talked to her.

EDMANDS: That's exactly what she said.

TINKER: Well, my dad is getting near retirement and I can just kind of see, you know, already that happening.

EDMANDS: But, let me tell you something. You see the people that don't do that, they don't last long. And they're miserable.

TINKER: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EDMANDS: I know people like that.

TINKER: The ones that retire and don't anything, you mean?

EDMANDS: And, to me, the worst—I was able to do it; I took off my uniform and walked away from it and was perfectly happy. But I see people, years later, that are still, still wearing that uniform. I mean, they may not physically have it on, but they're wearing it every day. This colonel—we used to work together [and he now] lives in Missouri—came to visit me. And on the way down here, he stopped to see this other colonel that he knew and he's says, "This guy's crazy." He said, "I got out in my car to drive off," [he] said, "he stood there at attention and saluted me while I drove off." (Laughs) You know that's what you do [when] you put generals on airplanes, you stand there and do that. He says, "This guy's crazy. I ain't going to back to see him."

TINKER: That's funny.

EDMANDS: But there's people like that from the military. They just never let it go. And I run into people like that and ...

TINKER: Yeah. I've run into a few.

EDMANDS: And I'll tell you, and you may see 'em up here, there's some people, and this is a different breed of cat, but they're some people, the experience of their entire life was that period they served in the military. That's their defining point of their whole life is that ... you know, the Battle of the Bulge or ...

TINKER: They can't let it go.

HESSLER: It's like the commercials. "What are gonna say about your life?" or, you know, the seals on the raft.

EDMANDS: Yeah. I see people like that.

TINKER: Some ... Yeah, I know what you mean. Sometimes it's warranted, and then sometimes it's not. Yeah, I know what you're saying.

EDMANDS: Yeah. You know people that had great careers and enjoyed it, I love talking to 'em. I'll tell you something, Lee. Don't ever try to one up anybody in the military. 'Cause I'll guarantee [there's] nothing you've ever done that somebody hasn't out done you. That is a given. You've learned that. There's just ...

TINKER: Yeah.

EDMANDS: You know, I like to hear what people did and where they went and their experiences. If I jumped a hundred times, somebody [else] jumped 101, you know what I mean? It's just ... I think that's the neat thing about the military.

HESSLER: I'll tell ya, I'm graduating in May and I'm at a crossroads myself, you know. I don't what I'm gonna do when I finish school. Um, you said that you'd recommend the military.

EDMANDS: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And I tell you, although the military is going to change drastically in numbers now because of what's going on but ... There may not even be the opportunity for you to go in any more. And I hate to say that, but they're gonna draw down some ...

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