

Everett H. Pratt Jr.

Part 1

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Interviewed by John Schwan

Transcribed by Unknown

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[02:37.36] Interview begins

Schwan: My name is John Schwan, I have the pleasure of interviewing Lieutenant General Everett Pratt, he and I both served in Vietnam and his career is what we're going to discuss, and I'd like to start with the simple stuff. Everett where were you born?

Pratt: I was born in a little town in Georgia outside of Atlanta called Covington. And grew up there.

Schwan: And at some point, you made a determination after Emory to join the [US] Air Force, I'd really like to understand that story.

Pratt: Okay, let's go back a little bit, I didn't have much military connection when I was growing up. My uncle George served in WWII, he was in the Air Force in England went in on D-Day +2, as with many of the WWII vets, he never talked about it when he came back. My father -- who was of military age -- when he was sixteen, he was working in a saw mill. He was working a rip saw, and the rip saw caught him here and pulled from here back, so he only had these two fingers in his right hand. So he was 4F; he was not physically able to serve. I think that upset him some because he'd tell stories back during the war, he was a businessman and he'd be on trains going places. People would holler at him, throw things at him, and son of a bitch how come you're not serving? Well, he didn't say that. Any rate, so, not a lot of military background, didn't really think about joining the military growing up, I think at one time I thought West Point might be a good idea, but that was more fleeting than not. But when I went to college, I went to two years Emory at Oxford, two-year college, where Emory was founded. And hadn't really thought about ROTC and they had Air Force ROTC detachment there...the short story is the reason I joined the Air Force, because I wanted to grow a beard. Now what happened was I went to college in 1960, which was the beginning of the centennial of the Civil War and so the Air Force ROTC detachment at Emory at Oxford had a drill team. Because they were doing civil war stuff, they all dressed for the drill team civil war uniforms and all had beards, because the civil war guys did. So I said, my mother would probably never let me grow a beard, but if I joined the ROTC on the drill team, I could grow a beard. So the reason I was in the Air Force is I got to grow a beard. So, I joined ROTC, Air Force ROTC, still with no

thought of making the Air Force a career and if I did, what would I do and I'm not one of these guys when I was eight years old, I went and saw the thunderbirds, blue angels, and said, "My oh my, that's me, and I wanna do that, be a fighter pilot, that didn't happen to me." So I went through college, stayed in ROTC, I think I figured out well, if I don't stay in ROTC and graduate and get a commission, I'll probably get drafted, well I think I'll stay in ROTC, 'cause back then you didn't...there weren't full scholarships. Just another course you took and things you did in summer camps and things. So, I graduated from Emory in '64 and thought when it came time to talk to the Air Force about going active duty...Air Force they fly airplanes, I think I'll see if I can get pilot training. It was almost about that simple. So '64 Vietnam is starting to crank up. They were starting to train pilots. The Air Force at the time I think was trying to graduate about three thousand a year, which is hell of a lot of pilots. So, basically anybody that was physically qualified got in. I mean, I had a degree in International Relations, I couldn't get in pilot training today...they're all engineers, they're all scientists, and they all have 4.0's, and I was none of those. But any rate, so, I said like, go to pilot training. Took the physical and passed it, I could see, and my heart beat, and all that works. So, I headed off to Laredo Air Force Base in the fall of '64, I had to go to pilot training and once again I had...was not considering...thinking I'm twenty, twenty-one years old, growing boy and not having fun and went to pilot training, started flying – I'd never flown before -- and basically fell in love with flying at pilot training. And was lucky enough to have the right skill sets I guess, and was able to graduate from pilot training, and early on in pilot training. I said, "Well, a lot of my friends, they'll, you know, get out of pilot training and go fly for four years and get acclimated...airline pilot..." and I thought about that. And...but somewhere in there I said hmm, fighter pilot's tough, it's kind of interesting, and so, fortunately, I graduated high enough in my class. Pilot training, to be able to pick a fighter you basically...they gave you...at the time there were like twenty-seven of us in my class that graduated out of, probably thirty-eight or fifty or forty-five that started. And so they came down and said, here are all the assignments. Took the number one guy and he picked and you went down. I think I was in top five or ten -- high enough -- there were fighters, chose an F-4, only fighters left, went off and became a fighter pilot. I'm not sure what your question was, but did I answer it?

Schwan: Yes, so what was your...I'm seeking motivation, 'cause that's what's gonna to be important to people, in my view, that will watch your interview.

Pratt: Well that's a good question, John...my initial motivation, as I told you, get to grow a beard...and then as I went to the ROTC I came to like the military, I came to like ROTC, and the drills and the discipline that went with it. And, frankly, the motivation...Air Force ROTC, if it had been an Army ROTC unit I'd probably join the Army. But, it was, John, the Air Force and like I said, I went to pilot training...was still the only motivation, was to go to pilot training, become a pilot if I could...at the time, maybe do my commitment, probably four to five years, and then go

be an airline pilot, but somewhere along the way -- in pilot training -- I said, I think I wanna be a fighter pilot. I can't give you the date but there were a lot of old fighter pilots that were instructors that probably influenced me, can't remember their names, but once I said I want to be a fighter pilot, I was able to choose a fighter and went off and got into the fighter world, I became...I became much more...motivated, not the right word, maybe enthusiastic, maybe all of a sudden here's something that I could do, that I could do for a living. Remember, Vietnam was --this was '64-'65 -- Vietnam was just starting, and I truly believe from what little I knew as a twenty, twenty-one-year-old college student, that I thought what we were doing in Southeast Asia was worthwhile, I believed in the domino theory. I believed that what Eisenhower said and I knew then that something that I would probably want to participate in. So does that answer your question?

Schwan: Yes, you understood John Foster Dulles.

Pratt: Absolutely.

Schwan: And you understood the whole...how much of that was because of your political science background?

Pratt: Don't know...I mean, I studied that in college and I, in fact, understood all of that, and...but it was a combination of understanding that from a political science standpoint, to use your word. But I truly did believe I was a fine upstanding young American citizen and I believed in, at the time, the cause, if you wanna call it that. I knew we were in Vietnam, and I said this is probably something that I can support and would like to do...as a matter of fact, when I graduated from pilot training, not only did you get to pick the airplane, but if it was an airplane that had multiple places to be stationed, you got to pick that. So I got an F-4 to USAFE, US Air Forces in Europe, so I was headed, after F-4 school, to Bitburg Air Base, Germany, to be in an F-4 wing that was being stood up in Germany that was, at the time, an F-105 unit, and they were transitioning from F-105s to F-4s, and so I was headed to Germany, and...I was at Tucson...Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, going through F-4 school -- when they came down the whole class was headed for Germany -- and then the personnel people came down and said, "We need five volunteers for Vietnam, because we need to...we got some openings, we need some more people to go." So I thought about it, and I volunteered to go to Vietnam along with four others...actually, I think there was three other guys, and one guy who was a senior guy in the class didn't get a choice, they said, "Because you're a senior you're going." So there were five of us that chose Vietnam.

Schwan: Had you graduated from college? You were done with that?

Pratt: I graduated from college in '64.

Schwan: Got your commission.

Pratt: I got my commission at summer camp that summer, went to pilot training as a second lieutenant in September of '64, graduated in October of '65, went to F-4 school at Tucson through about March or April of '65. And then you'll see there that I went to Eglin Air Force base, I just told you I volunteered for Vietnam...well, personnel systems, as they are, instead of sending us to Vietnam, they sent us to Eglin Air Force base to be in an F-4 squadron there. So the five of us that had volunteered went to Eglin.

Schwan: What was the mission of F-4 pilots? Close ground support? North Vietnam?

Pratt: All of the above, it depends on where you were stationed...if you ended up at Da Nang we'd had a different mission set than, say, if we had been at Cam Ranh Bay, which is much further South, or Phu Cat, which is much further south, the F-4 bases. They mainly stayed in-country doing close air support and those sorts of missions. In Da Nang we had both in-country missions and missions in North Vietnam. Had I been stationed in Thailand -- we had F-4s at the time, at Udorn and Ubon in Thailand --they at the time, only did Laos and North Vietnam, they very seldom came in-country. So, it depended on where you were. The F-4 was kind of a jack-of-all-trades for the Air Force, it originally was a Navy airplane, bought from McDonnell-Douglas by the Navy to be a fleet defense interceptor. That's why it had two cockpits: in the Navy it was a pilot in the front seat, Radar Intercept Officer in the back seat.

Schwan: Did you support -- in the ground support -- did you support the Marines and the Army?

Pratt: Yes. More so probably because, again, it was because I was in Da Nang.

Schwan: What divisions did you support in the Army? Do you remember?

Pratt: Oh John, I can't remember...I mean, whoever was in the northern half of the country.

Schwan: So you would've supported the Marines? You would've supported the First Cav.

Pratt: Right

Schwan: You would've supported the Fifth Armored Division too, right?

Pratt: Right. If you showed me a map, I would say this is where we flew our missions, but, I mean, we were in the...you know, back in Khe Sanh, and A Shau Valley, and...

Schwan: That's where I was. I'm just curious...life is a funny thing if you actually supported me...

Pratt: I probably did

Schwan: ...when I was in the A Shau Valley, in the street without joy.

Pratt: Exactly, I was in all those places. As a matter of fact, I wasn't flying F-4s there, we would...the C-123 ranch hands are the ones that dispersed the Agent Orange defoliants. I'd go fly one of them – I mean, just to go watch -- I'd sit in the jump seat, and fly them down the A Shau Valley gettin' shot at dumping Agent Orange outta the back...don't ask me why I wanted to do that but I did. So I did that as well.

Schwan: Understandable.

Pratt: Yeah.

Schwan: How long were you in Da Nang?

Pratt: I was in Da Nang twice, I was there my first tour.

Schwan: So '67 to '68?

Pratt: No...yes, '67, '68, and then again in '69 and '70, I believe.

Schwan: So '66, '67?

Pratt: Right.

Schwan: And then '67, '68?

Pratt: No.

Schwan: And then the third was '69 to '70?

Pratt: No, I was in Da Nang twice. [Both laugh]

Schwan: Okay.

Pratt: Let me get this piece of paper.

Schwan: Now just a second because I...you have your glasses on, but I believe I can see it. It says Da Nang '66, '67.

Pratt: Correct.

Schwan: And then it says Da Nang '69 and '70.

Pratt: That's correct.

Schwan: Okay, twice, okay.

Pratt: Those are two...full tours, if you will, and then one that's not shown here, if you'll see, where I was at George Air Force Base from '70 'til '73...in the spring of '72 I believe, I'm sorry, fall of '72, during the Linebacker II operation, we deployed a squadron from George to Takhli, Thailand, and flew missions out of Thailand.

Schwan: Did you make contact at any time during that...those three missions, with any enemy fighters?

Pratt: I saw enemy fighters, I never engaged. I saw 'em in the distance. The first tour, we were going north, second tour, we weren't going up...what we call Route Pack six, which is Hanoi, Haiphong area, and then when I was in Takhli we went north as well. So the way it worked was.... back in the '60s for the Air Force fighter pilots the tour was one year, or if you're flying combat missions in North Vietnam...a hundred missions in North Vietnam was a combat tour, so when you got to a hundred, you came home. Just like in WWII for the B-17 guys, twenty-five missions...if you made it, your tour was up. Well, for us it was a hundred missions, if you made it...and then your tour's over. So looking at letters that I sent my mother -- and I've got a couple here from my first tour -- at the end of every letter, I would write down the number of missions I had in North Vietnam -- we call 'em ins-and-outs, ins were in-country missions, outs...out-country was North Vietnam missions -- so I'd say forty-seven ins and sixty-two outs....

Schwan: Did you run bombing missions in Haiphong Harbor, etcetera?

Pratt: Haiphong was maybe-country, I mentioned Route Pack six long ago...the Air Force and Navy, then, as now, they ran separate wars. So to figure that out, the powers that be divided North Vietnam into six route packages: Route Package one, down near the DMZ, and then two, then three, then four, then Route Pack five was on the coast near Haiphong, and then Route Pack six was Haiphong -- north through the end of the country to the north part of the country -- and it was divided into Route Pack six alpha and bravo. I think alpha was over toward the...looking at the map...over toward the east, and six bravo would be toward the west. The Air Force owned Route Pack one. The Navy owned two, three, and four, I think we split five, and we split six, often bravo...so depending on your mission, the FRAG [fragmentary order] would come out, if you were in the Air Force you either flew down along the DMZ, or you flew up north, now...

Schwan: Did you fly over the A Shau?

Pratt: Yes, but that was...you know, I've been talking about North Vietnam; South Vietnam was not divided like that, South Vietnam missions, the missions we flew, again we got FRAG from Seventh Air Force, and we'd either fly close air support, a lot of that was off alert, we would have predetermined missions to go work...if a unit was in contact, we'd get a FRAG to take off, the fragmentary orders, so you'll take off and contact this FAC [Forward Air Controller], and then whatever was going on, we'd do...and we'd generally -- for those missions -- we'd be loaded with napalm, or Snake Eyes...Snake Eye was a five-hundred-pound general-purpose bomb that had a...

Schwan: I was gonna ask you about the five-hundred-pounder.

Pratt: They called it Snake Eye because it was configured separately for close air support than in non-close air support, if you dropped in Laos or North Vietnam, it would have a...the fins...it would be a slick bomb, you'd drop it at an altitude from a dive-bombing run at three or four thousand feet, accuracy wasn't very good, so you didn't wanna do those close air support in-country. But the Snake Eye had a retarded fin device on it, so we could drop 'em at low altitude...it would separate from the pin, the airplane, and then the fin device would deploy and slow it down very quickly, so we'd be away from it and wouldn't get caught in all the frag pattern [fragmentation radius]. So, most of the in-country missions -- we'd call 'em nape and snake -- napalm, which again, tumbled off the airplane and we got away from it. The Snake Eyes would... we'd be away from it, and there were twenty mike-mike, 'cause we generally had a twenty millimeter cannon.

Schwan: Were you involved in...with infantry units when they were poppin' smoke? So you'd stay away from 'em, and how did that work?

Pratt: Absolutely, we were always under the control of a Forward Air Controller. We didn't go in, and you wouldn't go in and talk to the guys on the ground, we didn't have victor radios anyways, or fox mikes, so we couldn't talk to 'em, but the Forward Air Controllers -- airborne generally, in either O-1s or O-2s later in the war -- they would be the ones that would talk to the guys on the ground, they would know the ground situation, and they would tell us where to drop, and we would either...either they would mark with the Willie Pete -- white phosphorous rocket, 2.75-inch rocket -- or the guys on the ground would mark with smoke, and we would get directions from the FAC as to where we would drop in relation to whatever the smoke was. Sometimes, we would drop in relation to geographical references, and that was not very often. When we'd come up on freak [radio frequency] with a FAC, we'd check in with the FAC, and would either...he would work us immediately, or if he was working something fairly significant, and the guys were having trouble, he might have had five or six stacks of

fighters in a stack, so we'd check in and he'd say, "Gunfighter two-one, hold at eight thousand feet, you're number five in the pattern," So he'd work a flight of fighters that were lowest and they would run out of munitions, and he'd stack 'em down, and the next guys would go in, and when you checked in with him -- when it became your turn -- he would give us...okay, this is what's happening, the good guys -- we wouldn't call them that, whatever you call 'em -- here's where they are, they're in contact, they've got bad guys two hundred meters over here, and they're doing this, and kinda give us the big picture...he asked us what our ordnance was, and we'd tell him because we had separate distances that we could be to the good guys with the different ordnance, he had to know that, so he would make sure that we dropped so far...so many meters away from the good guys. So he'd talk us in, we'd understand it, and then he would mark, and then we would set up depending on how he wanted our ordnance dropped. We could make several passes, 'cause if we had, say, four cans of napalm, and six Snake Eyes, and twenty mike-mike, we could do all three of them in separate passes, we'd just set up what we'd call a wheel, we'd drop and go up this big wheel, and the next guy would come in...and when we rolled in, we'd have to tell the FAC we had his smoke, we've got your smoke, we're in, and he would tell us two hundred meters north, hundred meters north or whatever, and we would go and then we would dispense our ordnance, and he would...when we were through, he would talk to the guys on the ground, and give us what he considered to be our bomb damages, our BDA, I mean sometimes maybe you killed a bunch of trees, or sometimes, "We think you killed so many KIA [Killed in Action]," or, depending on...of course it was all a guess...

Schwan: Could you see anything when you were doing your passes? Could you see the enemy?

Pratt: Depends. A lot of times they were under the canopy, you know, jungle canopy, we wouldn't see them, but sometimes, if it was something that was in the open, I mean, yeah we would see them. I mean, I've strafed guys, and I've seen 'em when I rolled in.

Schwan: And so you've also seen the love of the infantry for napalm?

Pratt: Yes, wonderful weapon.

Schwan: Yeah.

Pratt: It was good because it was...we could get up close and dirty with it. The Snake Eye, because of the frag pattern of the weapon -- five hundred pounder's a pretty big weapon -- I can't remember, I think we couldn't drop it any closer than like, two hundred meters from...maybe it was a hundred meters, I can't remember...but napalm we could get within fifty, a hundred meters...and then, of course, twenty mike-mike cannon, twenty millimeter, we could get fairly close with that.

Schwan: Which, as you know from the infantryman's perspective, was critical, because obviously the enemy...

Pratt: Mhmm.

Schwan: ...understood he had to make contact close.

Pratt: Right.

Schwan: Did you ever work in conjunction with Cobras? Or were they off-station when you came in?

Pratt: Generally, we did not, I don't ever remember working the scene...I mean, I wouldn't work a close air support mission with another side of fighters, they would...it was kind of, you know, one at a time...Cobras would do their thing and we would -- after the Cobras had expended -- we'd come in depending what it was, but it was always through a...very seldom a ground FAC, almost always when we worked in-country with FACs, it be airborne Forward Air Controllers.

Schwan: And what was the aircraft they were flying?

Pratt: Generally O-1s, early on, but later they got O-2s, Oscar duck, which was a Cessna push-pull, I think...yeah, airplane, and eventually OV-10, probably on my second tour, probably before the OV-10 -- which is an OV-10 Bronco, which was made by North American -- was kind of invented for the...because it had...it could carry weapons. With the O-1, the Bird Dog, I mean, the weapon was, a guy had a grenade he was throwing out the window [laughs]! That would be his only weapon, but of course they were there early on.

Schwan: At that point, did you have any interface with the infantrymen?

Pratt: Generally, only at the O-club on Friday night, and in Da Nang it was more Marines, because, as you know Marines...first party that came ashore at Da Nang, and that was kinda Marine country. We were on one side of the runway, and the Marines were on the other...but the infamous, or famous, dune club -- Da Nang officer's open mess -- had a lot of...lot of Marines would come in, you'd have to check your weapon at the door, they'd hang there, hang their weapons and come in, they wouldn't let them go to the bar with their weapon at their side. Which was probably a pretty good idea I guess! [Laughs].

Schwan: That was smart.

Pratt: Yeah, yeah. So mostly Marines. And not so much of my first tour, on my second tour I had more interface with Marines because my second tour was more of a...it was in-country, and a lot of more Laos stuff than I did on my first tour, but...,and I'll get into this later

but, I was...there are two kinds of FACs, there the FACs that worked with the in-country close air, and there's also...they were called Fast FACs, when we realized that the little airplanes couldn't survive in Vietnam, they first started using F-100s and eventually two seat F-100s, and eventually F-4s, they call 'em Fast FACs. And I don't know if you've heard of "Misty", "Misty" was the famous Fast FAC that, in the F-100s...the guy that started, Bud Day, who's a Medal of Honor...was a...I knew Colonel Day, a wonderful American, that I had the privilege of knowing, not then, but afterwards. He got shot down as a "Misty," when he got captured...and then ended up in Hanoi Hilton, but he was flying a "Misty" FAC mission. But those FAC missions were either in two-seat F-4s or...it was all F-4s, too, or two-seat F-100s...had a lot of work in Laos, interdiction, not generally, we didn't work close air support, troops in contact because there weren't a lot of troops on the ground in Laos, except for a few, and I'll talk about that later, but most of our stuff then was look at truck part, look at trucks, catch 'em in the nighttime. The F-4 would be a FAC, and we carried Willie P rockets, and we'd even carry bombs that we would mark and bring in fighters on truck parts in places where we could find...where they would have their stuff on the ground as they moved them down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but that's another story.

Schwan: Now, on your second tour, were you in command of a squad or squadron, a unit? When did you have command responsibility in Vietnam?

Pratt: Well, it was lieutenant on my first tour, captain my second tour, and normally a squadron commander in the Air Force is a lieutenant colonel major or senior major level. The only real command I had was on my second tour, I mentioned the "Stormy," the Fast FAC mission, each base that had 'em had their own call sign, we were "Stormy," "Stormy" FAC out of Da Nang, and it was... there were only like, six or eight crews, and we were pulled out of the squadrons and we were our own little...we weren't a squadron, we were just the "Stormy" FACs, and we were...we had our own little command structure, we worked directly for the director of operations in the wing, which is a full colonel, and we did the FAC mission, and generally that was headed by a major. On my second tour I was a "Stormy" FAC for like, five months...wonderful gentleman named Tommy Warren was our commander, and about a month before my "Stormy" FAC tour was up, Tommy got killed. Took a thirty-seven millimeter in the cockpit, fortunately his back-seater didn't get hurt. He was able to take the airplane, he flew it to Ubon, he ejected both of 'em, but Tommy was dead. Any rate, so, when Tommy got killed I was the senior captain at "Stormy", so, only for about a month, I kinda led, I commanded "Stormy" FACs, but it was only very short. My first real command, I was a flight commander, I was in the Air Force flight commanders...in a squadron. It's not as big a deal as it would be at that same level in the Army, but the first level of command in the Air Force is normally at the senior major, lieutenant colonel, at the squadron level...and I did that as a lieutenant colonel.

Schwan: In Vietnam?

Pratt: No.

Schwan: No.

Pratt: No. When I went back...I went to Thailand in '72. I probably was a flight commander in the squadron I was in in George Air Force Base, and again the commander of our squadron, when we deployed, was a lieutenant colonel. So I never really had a combat command.

Schwan: Were your units experiencing a relatively high casualty rate, or no?

Pratt: It depended on the time. When I was in Da Nang on my first tour and we were going north, Route Pack six -- Hanoi, Haiphong -- a lot. We lost, geez, I don't know, probably a half a dozen, maybe up to a dozen airplanes, a lot of those guys became POWs. Several were killed. And we lost...we didn't lose a lot of airplanes in-country. We did lose some, but actually the in-country war for the Air Force fighter pilot was, I don't wanna say a safe war, but I mean...like the guys at Cam Ranh, they didn't lose a lot of airplanes. I mean, because the general opposition, if you will, wasn't much bigger than a .50 cal, at that, a lot of probably small arms, .50 cal, unless it was a...

Schwan: Well, they were more VC down there.

Pratt: Exactly, and they didn't have any big weapons. You didn't really start worrying until you got into the, what do they got, until you got into the twenty-three millimeter, thirty-seven millimeter and larger, or if you went North into the Surface to Air Missiles, SA-2 missiles, they could hurt you if they hit you, they'd knock you down some.

Schwan: Did you, during your tours -- and this is a personal question -- understand the value the infantrymen placed in you, and on the air support? Did you know how critical it was?

Pratt: I would say yes, but mainly from, again, our interface mostly with the Marines. But we did interface with the Army infantry, but only...frankly, we would sometimes take trips, we'd fly out to like, up to Da Lat, and up in the highlands, and visit with...but mostly in garrison. I mean, they wouldn't let us out in the field, but we'd visit, there was a more of a get-to-know who it is that you're supporting kind of thing, I guess, that's the way they were organized. And we'd take C-123s or something, they'd take us into some dirt strips, like at Da Lat or somewhere, and we would either, you know, get in a jeep or get in a helicopter, and fly up and, you know, spend a half a day with our Army counterparts and talk to 'em about what we were doing, from that perspective, and I have no idea who organized all of that. But maybe it was somebody saying, "Well these guys need to know each other," because basically the only time

we ever saw 'em is, you know, we didn't see you guys, I mean, we'd see you popping smoke...we wouldn't see you, like we wouldn't see the bad guys, you'd be in a tree canopy somewhere. You generally wouldn't be out in the open, if you did you didn't wanna be there. So...

Schwan: Well speaking personally, the respect was tremendous, we respected the Huey pilots.

Pratt: Oh yeah.

Schwan: And the jets.

Pratt: Yep.

Schwan: 'Cause they would always support us, and the interesting thing is, we knew you didn't know...

Pratt: Right.

Schwan: ...what you were doing for us, 'cause you couldn't.

Pratt: Right. I mean, we never got there...I mean, we'd go in drop our nape, our snake, we'd shoot a little twenty mike-mike, get the BDA report, if it sounded good we'd go back, report it. "Hey, we...they said we had twenty KIA today," which would be a good mission. Or, they would say, "Four possible trucks and twelve possible KIA," that'd be a wild-ass guess on their part. So, that's what we knew.

Schwan: Pentagon made a decision that it was a body count war.

Pratt: Body count war, right.

Schwan: So we spent an inordinate amount of time digging up graves...that's another story.

Pratt: They're doing that now too, by the way, but that's another story.

Schwan: Are they really?

Pratt: The ISIS thing, you look at it, that's all it is, body count. Well, we killed a thousand ISIS there, so they're turning this into a...a little off subject here, but...

Schwan: No, it's not off subject.

Pratt: They're turning it into a body count war.

Schwan: Because what's more important is what you feel.

Pratt: Right.

Schwan: And what you experienced, and we both know that you'll never not feel what you feel, as stupid as that sounds.

Pratt: Yeah, exactly. A couple good articles I want you to read, I'll send you copies of 'em, written by air guys about why we're not doing what we're supposed to be doing, and what we could be doing different...at any rate...

Schwan: Did you have any experience with puff the magic dragon?

Pratt: Yeah, we...as a matter of fact, I think I flew with them a couple of times.

Schwan: Did you?

Pratt: We didn't know any better, we were young, foolish...we were bulletproof, invisible. Like I said I had gone to the A Shau flying on a C-123 to watch the guys dropping Agent Orange in a valley with the guys shooting down on us from both sides. Boy, that was a lot of fun! [Laughs] We didn't know any better! So, I would fly anything with anybody. I kind of got off subject a while ago...I flew with the Marines on my second tour. They also had a Fast FAC outfit on the other side of the runways in Da Nang, called "Playboy," and they flew two-seat A-4s, and they also had a Fast FAC mission in Laos. And we got to know them, and they'd come fly with us in F-4s, and we'd go fly with them in their A-4s, so I've got probably forty, fifty hours of combat time logged in Marine jets. So flying with them over in Laos...but the second tour's more of an out-country. The first tour was combination in-country, out-country, Da Nang, and a lot of out-country because we were the closest one to North Vietnam, but still, you know, we were the ones who would do the close air support, if the Marines couldn't do it, up along the Túy Loan, Dang Hoi, up along the...when the Marines were up along the DMZ, or in the A Shau...you guys were in Khe Sanh, or down in the highlands, wherever they were we would...we either flew FRAG missions -- it was a preFRAG mission -- or we set a lot of alert, and the alert would be, generally with nape and snakes, and twenty mike-mike. And we'd sit there, and it was...somebody would be in contact, needed some help, they called up to the system, and we could scramble, it'd probably take us -- the F-4 was never really be built to be a air defense fighter that you get airborne in three minutes -- but it would...we'd have it all set up, and we could normally be airborne in fifteen minutes, 'cause we'd have to go out and crank it up, get everything warmed up, get the inertial navigation system online, which took the longest because the airplane had to be stable for that to...and we'd scramble, be off, and be on station probably within thirty minutes of when the call came, and those were good missions...we enjoyed doing that.

Schwan: Now at what point...what was your attitude, going through three tours, about the attitude of the population in America?

Pratt: It wasn't very good...got better I think, when I came back from the first tour, I mean, you know, we landed in San Francisco and probably got spit on.

Schwan: Yeah, that was not a fun place.

Pratt: Not a fun place to be, you know, and it probably pissed us off more than anything else.

Schwan: Too many fist fights in San Francisco.

Pratt: It was, you know...we became more determined, I mean, like I told you, I got a copy of these guys wearing a letter when I...I got them in my first tour, and I was only a hundred mission thing, so it was either you have a hundred missions north and generally for us it ran out of Da Nang, it ran -- the tours -- it ran from six to nine months, because if you were going north a lot you'd get 'em quicker, if you weren't going north as much, it'd take you longer to get 'em. So, any rate, in the Spring of '67, I had an assignment to come back to go fly F-106s, which was an air defense fighter in air defense command, great airplane, single-seat fighter...and somewhere along the line in that spring, I decided I wanted to go back for a second tour. Now the F-4, as you know -- at the time -- or maybe you didn't, it was two seat airplane, as I explained...Navy built it as a...out of fleet defense interceptor, pilot front seat, Radar Intercept Operator back seat. When the Air Force bought it and converted it to Air Force use, the Air Force decided it was gonna be a two pilot airplane. And for long time, it was, and when I got in the F-4 -- the backseat pilots, we called 'em GIBs, guys in the back -- I was a GIB. The GIBs were all young pilots like me, and my first tour was all in the backseat of the F-4. But the Air Force, who configured the airplane with the stick the Navy didn't have -- we couldn't put the gear up and down but we could fly the airplane -- the Navy didn't have a stick in the backseat. So, if you -- after the end of your GIB tour -- if you wanted to come back for second tour -- volunteer for a second tour -- they'd send you to front seat school, for lack of a better word, RTU, Replacement Training Unit. We'd spend six months in the RTU getting qualified in the front seat, and then either go back, or once again, I volunteered for second tour, went to front seat school, and, again, not going back, I went to Eglin again [laughs]. Went to the fighter wing at Eglin, and eventually went with a squadron to deploy...I can tell you about that later, how that worked, but we again deployed to Da Nang as a squadron in the F-4E, which is the newest version....

Schwan: How many planes in the squadron, General?

Pratt: Depends on the squadron, generally, either between eighteen and twenty-four. But the general number was twenty-four, you would have four flights of six airplanes...actually the flight didn't own the airplanes, the squadron owned the airplanes, and the flight consisted of them. The air crew with the flight commander -- you had a flight commander would generally be a captain -- then the next level up was the operations officer, normally had an assistant ops officer who was normally a major, an ops officer who was a senior major, junior lieutenant colonel, squadron commander was generally a lieutenant colonel, and then the maintenance...there normally three or four hundred -- maybe I'm high on that, can't remember -- maintenance associated, because I'm counting maintainers, I'm counting the bomb, the ammo guys, everybody that made up the squadron now. The airport...Air Force reorganized several times when I was in the Air Force, in the fighter world, about how to work them. At one time, the fighter squadron commander owned the crews and the airplanes and the maintenance guys. At one time, the fighters were in command of the air crews, and the maintenance was all under the deputy **general? _____ [48:48]** for maintenance, and we called it the communist maintenance system, where all seventy-two airplanes and a wing belonged to the maintenance guys, and when it came time to fly, they would issue the airplanes, and you had no interaction with particular airplane or the crew chiefs that went with them, so that was one end. The other end where the squadron commander owned 'em all, the whole shootin' match, and in the kind of middle, was where the squadron commander owned the airplanes, the air crews, and the maintenance guys -- aircraft maintenance unit -- but only the maintainers that went with the air crew, the aircraft, and all the ammo guys, and the back-shop guys, the avionics guys, they belonged to the maintenance guys. So, it depended.

Schwan: How many hours of maintenance for one hour of flight? Ballpark, obviously.

Pratt: I'm trying to remember...depending on the airplane...they'd track that, mean time between maintenance, MTBF, or Mean Time Between Flying hours...I'm guessing that, in the world of combat, you'd probably have twenty hours, fifteen hours of maintenance.

Schwan: That's amazing, for the Huey, they always said it was twenty-two hours per one hour of flight.

Pratt: I could be off on that.

Schwan: No, I'm just...

Pratt: But with new airplanes, hopefully...that's one of the things they try to build into the new airplanes, F-16, F-22, all that...to get that number down, so you could spend less time maintaining the airplane more time flying it [laughs]. So I'm guessing in combat, it would be that. I mean, because you gotta figure if an airplane was down for some major maintenance problem for a week that really rocks the number.

Schwan: So, what was your rank on your third tour?

Pratt: Still a captain [laughs].

Schwan: Still a captain? It obviously wasn't because of your skill.

Pratt: I made major...it's on this piece of paper somewhere, I pinned on major...one April '76, came in in '64, that was at the twelve-year point, which was about normal, then, for major, you made captain in four and a half/five years, at the time, in the Air Force, you made major...it looks like ten or twelve, lieutenant colonel I made in...looks like I pinned on in fifteen years, which, frankly, was a little early. Pinned on colonel in, where is that, nineteen years? '64 to '83, I guess, which is well early, and then colonel brigadier, it's a different ballgame...different ballgame above that.

Schwan: Did you happen to have one particular mentor, or were you your own?

Pratt: I had several...depending on where I was growing up in the system...I'll tell you a story. If we're about stories, right?

Schwan: It's all about stories, and it's about personal.

Pratt: I probably made, in the Air Force, at the time, you could make...everybody made first lieutenant in a year and a half, as long as you weren't jailed. Everybody made captain at four and a half years, again, as long as you weren't jailed. It's different now. In the Army now, my niece's son, who's in the Army National Quartermaster Corps, just pinned on his first lieutenant, good kid, went to Michigan State, full ride ROTC, he said, the Army now, they only promote about 80% of the first lieutenants to captain. When I was in the Air Force, again, as long as you weren't jailed or whatever, you made captain, everybody made captain. Any rate, so then you made major at the ten, eleven...you'd make it at the ten-year point, and then go on a list and get promoted, you made lieutenant colonel on time, in probably sixteen or seventeen years, and then make colonel, on time, in twenty-two, twenty-three years. That's on time. We had early promotions. We called it "below the zone."

Schwan: And did you have senior officers helping your career along?

Pratt: Yes and no, I made up through major on time, and I had a couple of mentors that didn't help me get promoted early, but I looked up to, at the...probably the captain level. I worked for both these gentlemen when I was a captain at George Air Force Base as an instructor from '70 'til '74. They were both DOs, director of operations colonel, one of 'em was named Larry Welch, one of was named Jack Chain. Larry Welch ended up being the chief of staff of the Air Force, one of the smartest guys I ever met in my life, he was a mentor, and Jack Chain ended up being CINCSAC, managing Strategic Air Command, and Larry Welch was

CINCSAC also, but he moved from SAC to chief of staff of the Air Force, and General Chain moved to be the CINCSAC, and I knew him both as a captain, and later as a lieutenant colonel in the Pentagon. Knew General Welch as a captain, as a DO, and once again, when I was a squadron commander, he was a three-star numbered Air Force commander, within the Air Force you go from squadron to wing to numbered Air Force to major and command...

Schwan: Now were most of the senior officers combat pilots?

Pratt: Yes, all fighter pilots. All the mentors I had were all fighter pilots.

Schwan: And the guys that got promoted were all fighter pilots?

Pratt: Not necessarily then, completely changed now, I guess.

Schwan: What's it changed to now?

Pratt: A lot more...I call 'em, non-rated. If you were rated, you were a pilot or a navigator, non-rated you weren't. A lot more non-rated, lot more diverse. I mean, when I was in there, there were never any women, female generals. We got...I think, the Air Force has two or three four-stars now, who are female. Never happened when I was growing up. Anyway back to mentors, I had these two gentlemen as mentors at the captain level...at the captain-lieutenant colonel level, General Welch. And then at the...when I was a colonel, I had a mentor, four-star named Jack Gregory, wonderful gentleman. He was commander of Pacific Air Forces when I was a colonel at Misawa Air Force Base as both the DO and vice wing commander, both colonel positions. Also, a mentor that I had all along, he was a friend and a colleague, and we served together six or seven times, couple times he worked for me, couple times I worked for him, a mentor, and still one of my best friends today, Mike Ryan, who ended up being chief of staff of the Air Force. He lives in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. His dad was the chief of staff of the Air Force, General John "three-fingered" Jack. He -- Mike and his dad -- were the only two father/son Air Force chiefs of staff. But I served with, either with or for Mike, six or seven times. My last assignment was as vice commander, and USAFE...Mike was USAFE commander at the time as a four-star. And he helped move me along, and I looked up to him, and he and I are still best friends. Kind of a mentor and best friend. So I had...but all my mentors were fighter pilots. I'll tell you a story about how I got...probably how I got to be a wing commander, and how that turned into me making general. I was...the reason I was at Misawa is...the deal is my commander, again, Mike Ryan. Mike had been in the Pentagon as a colonel, I had come to the Pentagon as a lieutenant colonel, and the colonels lived out of Air War College, and I worked with Mike, in the Pentagon. And Mike had made Colonel a year or so earlier than I did, and had been at tech headquarters and was in the Pentagon. And they sent Mike to Misawa...at the time the Navy owned Misawa, the Air Force had owned Misawa many years, it was a fighter base, they had pulled the fighters out, and the Navy took it over as a P-3 base. Then the Air

Force decided to go back in with an F-16 wing in the '80s. They say the reason the Air Force went back in -- in Misawa the weather was absolutely dog shit all the time -- it was right on the sea and the fog would come in, it was terrible weather and it was cold. The first year we were there we got a hundred-eighty inches of snow. It was just terrible. They say the Air Force, one joke, the reason they put a fighter wing back in there in the '80s, is because they forgot why they pulled one out in the '70s. [Both laugh]. They pulled the F-4 wing out. So, Mike hired me...they sent Mike to Misawa to be the wing commander, and stand up the wing, and there were no fighters there. And Mike and I joked that when we...and I eventually came because Mike went to the center, the personnel system, and said he wanted to have me to be his DO, because I was a junior colonel. I was stationed at the Pentagon, the phone rang at about four o'clock in the morning. And I picked it up said, "Hi Mike, how you doing?" I said, "Hm. Okay, great. Yeah." And Joyce woke up, and said, "Who's this?" "It's Mike Ryan" "What'd Mike want?" "Well, we're going to Misawa Japan to work for Mike." She said, "Where's that?" And I said, "I have no idea!" [Both laugh]. So we went to Misawa, and I was the DO, and Mike served his tour out, and he left and went to Washington to be the executive officer to Larry Welch, a name I used before, who by now was chief of staff of the Air Force, and Mike had worked for General Welch several times, as I have. When Mike left, the wing commander moved up, a nice gentleman named Dean Stickell, and I moved up to vice commander. And they changed commanders at Pacific Air Forces, and the commander there then was a gentleman named Jack Gregory, wonderful gentleman. Jack had been raised under a gentleman named Bill Creech...Creech Air Force Base, you've probably heard of, named after him. He was the command of Tactical Air Command, one of the old fighter pilots, him and Bob Dixon and Bill Momyer, they were all fighter pilots that kind of ran and molded the Air Force in my view through the '60s and '70s. One of General Creech's...Gregory was a disciple of Creech, and one of General Creech's....idiosyncrasy's not the right word, but if you worked for Creech and he called you in to interview for a job, or called you in to tell you...to give you something to do, you wrote it down. Because Creech figured if nobody was smart enough to remember a whole set of taskings in their head, so if somebody...if he told them to do something and they didn't write it down, he didn't figure it'd get done. And so, if you went to see Creech, it was either an interview or...this got passed to...I'll tell you a Creech war story. I'm throwing names around, but I just knew all these guys. When Creech was a commander at TAC, his executive officer, a colonel who was named Joe Ralston...Joe ended up being the vice chairman of the joint chiefs, retired as SACEUR/CINCEUR, Supreme Allied Command Europe, Commander in Chief, European Command. And the wing commander at Langley Air Force base at the time -- and the headquarters of Tactical Air Command, was at Langley on Hampton Virginia, in the Hampton Roads -- was a guy named Butch Viccellio. Butch told me this story, I worked for him, eventually ended up being a four-star. But he always met when General Creech was out on a trip, he would come back on his Learjet, and Butch would meet him and say...you know, salute

him, because he was the wing commander, and General Creech would normally get in his staff car and go home. And Butch said he met him at about midnight one night, and he drove out, you know, met him, and generally General Creech would get out the airplane, Butch would salute him, and he'd get out of his airplane and drive home. And Ralston was with Creech because he was traveling with him. And Butch says, General Creech got out, saluted him, and then came back and said, "Hey Butch, I've got a couple things I want you to do". And started spouting off, and Butch says he didn't have anything to write on. So he's looking around, he's pulling his wallet out, looking for something to write on, and Creech saw, and he turns to Ralston and says, "Joe, get him something to write on." [Both laugh.] So, at any rate, back to Misawa. So I'm sitting at Misawa as the vice commander, colonel, hoping eventually I can get a wing somewhere. And I didn't really know Joe Gregory...I had met him, but I didn't really know him that well. He was gonna come to Misawa on an official visit, big deal when a four-star came to your base. Dean Stickell was the gentleman who was my wing commander, guy named Dick Dillenbeck was the base commander, who ran the support group. But about a month before Greg became the vice commander of Pacific Air Forces...H. T. Johnson was a two-star, he came to visit, probably in preparation, to make sure everything looked good for the four-star coming. And as he was leaving, he said, "Oh, by the way, Ev, you need to know that General Gregory is looking to move you. He didn't say where, what he's interested in doing. And he's coming out in a couple months, as you know, and he will interview you. I don't know how he will do it, but you will be interviewed, so, just to put you on your..." I said, "Okay." So I got a call from the lieutenant colonel at Pacific Air Force headquarters, who was the personnel guy -- who ran the colonel's assignment -- he again...he said, "Colonel Pratt, you're being interviewed. Let me give you some advice: General Gregory is a disciple of General Creech, so when he interviews you, make sure that you have something to write with and you take notes". And I said, "Okay, got it." And somebody else told me that, I forget who. So, sure enough, he shows up for his visit at Misawa, and he's there for about three days, and on the second day he's going on a base ride-around with the wing commander and the base commander, and I wasn't included in that on the itinerary. And they had kind of a van, and Stickell was driving, and General Gregory was going to ride in the right seat and Bill was going to be in the back seat. And they were going to ride around and look at the base, and both Gregory and Creech were big and how the base looked, and how people felt better about themselves when they had good places to live, and the base looked good, etcetera, another story. But they were at the officer's club, and after lunch they were getting in the van, and I was there saluting them, and Jack Gregory said, "Ev, are you going?" I said, "No, sir." "Would you mind going?" I said, "No, Sir, fine sir." So I jumped in the back seat. So Stickell's driving, Gregory is here, Dillenbeck's here, and I'm here. And we're riding around base, and Gregory is talking to Stickell and Dillenbeck about, you need to do this, or let's do this here, or what about this, and what'd you do about this, and they're both talking. And I'm sitting in the back seat writing. All I did for the whole hour. One of the

guys who told me that, as a matter of fact it was General Ed Tixier, he was the Fifth Air Force commander, he said "I don't care if you're writing a letter to your mother, but you write." So I spent the entire one hour taking notes, never said a word. So, the visit was over, and the next day...and that's the only thing Gregory said to me the whole visit, he's got his big airplane out there, a KC-135, and we're all out there in, you know, in the conga line, saluting him as he gets on the airplane, along with our wives. And, you know, I'm like, the second... and he's getting up the stairs to the airplane, and he gets back and says, "Ev, come here for a second." and "Yes sir." I walked up and he said, "Just so you know, I'm gonna move you pretty soon, you'll be hearing from the personnel guys pretty soon." That's all he said. About a week later I get a call, and it said, "Colonel Pratt, you're going to Kunsan to be the wing commander." And I'm convinced, to this day, that the reason -- because he didn't know me that well -- to this day the reason I went to Kunsan to be the wing commander is because I'm sitting in the back seat of that van...

Schwan: Writing it down.

Pratt: ...writing a letter to my mother! [Laughs]. And frankly, some things happen at Kunsan and we'll get into those later if you want. I did some good things, but I always said I'd rather be lucky than good, and I lucked in and had a couple of good things happen, and back the way the Air Force personnel system worked that way, that basically the four-stars, basically picked who got to be there, even though they had a board and all that, the four-stars all had a quota, and they got to make up their promotion list, and the number got picked off and I ended up high enough, I'll tell you another story about that if you want to hear it. John, we'll keep you here all day.

Schwan: Well, we may come back.

Pratt: Let's come back to that. But let's go back to Vietnam.

Schwan: Yeah. I'd like you to discuss the decorations, the circumstances around the decorations.

Pratt: Okay. I'll tell you three war stories, and we can go further if you want. Two of them I got a decoration for. One of them I don't think I did, but it's a great war story, because it's got an ending to it. The first one I'll tell you about happened on my first tour, and it's...this is the one that I ended up getting the letter from Westmorland and Momyer and on down, and ended up getting a DFC from that. And you heard me mention earlier, before we started, General "Sandy" Vandenberg, who ended up being a two-star, retired as a two-star, his dad -- Hoyt S Vandenberg Jr. -- was the second chief of staff of the Air Force, Vandenberg Air Force Base is named for him. I was with the 390th squadron at Da Nang, and it was in the spring, early fall...I'm sorry, late winter, early spring of '67. Vandenberg was squadron commander, I was his

GIB, guy in the back, I flew all my missions with him. We flew together a couple times early on and he liked me, so I became his GIB. Another guy named Ed Lipsey, whose name is on that piece of paper, he was one of the flight commanders, maybe he was an assistant ops officer, he was a major. And he knew some guys, that in Saigon...that were Air Force guys that wore civvies. And they were part of an organization that I'm sure you've heard of, at the time it was top secret, probably above that. MACV-SOG: Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Operations Group. MAC SOG. And you can read about it on the net, google it, it's all unclassified now, it was top secret at the time. They were the guys, headquarters at Seventh...not Seventh, at MACV, that ran all the out-country spook stuff. That put guys in on the ground, wherever they put...they were I guess all Special Forces guys, or delta guys, I guess we didn't have Special Forces back then. But the spooks that went in on the ground and did the observations in the different countries, they were in North Vietnam and everywhere. I'd never heard of them. Well, apparently they had a -- and I'm hoping this is unclassified, at least MACVSOG is -- but they had a team on the ground, I don't even know if they were American or Vietnamese or what, you never knew, but up northeast of Hanoi, and they needed some sort of resupply. It's pretty tough to get something, besides a big airplane, a smaller fighter in there, but they had these M...I can't remember the designation, but they were these supply pods that fit on an F-4, and they were for supply, and they had some sort of airborne parachute retard device, that would -- when you'd drop them -- it'd slow them down, I guess to where they'd land gently and wouldn't bust open. I've no idea what was in them, obviously some kind of supplies, I don't know if it was food, or first aid, or whatever. Anyway, this guy, Lipsey, knew an Air Force guy that was on the staff down there, and they were looking to put a supply mission into these guys up in Hanoi, northeastern Hanoi. So he called Ed and we didn't think about it, said "Hey, we're gonna see if you guys want to do that." So Ed got read into the program, his boss Vandenberg got read into the program, I'm not sure how many got read in. But, this is what you're going to do. And so, we set up this mission, it was all FRAG, nothing. The guys from Saigon came up in civvies and briefed us. And all we know was, we knew where we were going, and what we were dropping, and didn't know who we were dropping it to. But we were sending two ship of F-4's in with these supply pods at night, into this place. As I remember, all we had were coordinates, and they were going to mark it, once they knew we were inbound, they were going to mark it with flares or something on the side. And we were gonna take off, go to the tanker...and back then doing everything NORDO, no radio, was a big deal. It was a completely NORDO mission, hit the tanker, find the tanker, get on the tanker, no words passed. Let them coast in probably north and east of Haiphong, at five hundred feet or lower, at night, under the radars. And I was doing the navigating, because I was in the lead airplane. And we navigated up, and the only thing...we were communicating with these guys, I remember, only by mic clicks, so many mic clicks. Click click click. Click one over and they'd click back. And at the appropriate time, when we did the right clicks when we were getting close, and then

they...they weren't smoke, they were flare pots so we could see them, and then we dropped the whatever it was we dropped. Came off again at a low level, out of the radar, popped back up, then we could talk at the tanker again, probably a five, six hour mission. And as I remember, Vandenberg got a Silver Star, and Lipsey I don't know what he got, but I've got, the awards decora, all it says is 'Highly Classified Mission'. I got a DFC for that, and I got letters from Westmoreland. So, I'll leave it with these guys, for...so that was one of my...I got four DFCs, that was one of them. I frankly don't remember the circumstances surrounding the other three, I mean I got 'em...

Schwan: What about the Silver Star?

Pratt: The Silver Star was on my second tour. That's when I was a "Stormy" Fast Forward Air Controller. And I was...that mission, generally was in Laos. And we would take off, and we would go over, and we would do recce on the different road structures. And the intel would have suspected truck parts, and we'd go look for them and see if we could find them, and if we did we'd call the ordnance in, etcetera. The only ordnance we had was...we didn't carry ordnance except for a couple of pods of 2.75 Folded Fin Aerial Rockets, FFAR, that had Willie Pete, white phosphorous smoke charges, and we'd use those to mark when we'd call fighters in to drop. And we had the twenty mike-mike that came in the internal gun that came in the F-4. I had a call from our controlling agency, which was the C-130 airborne command and control, call sign Hillsborough, and they said, "Hey, we need you to go, we've got somebody in trouble, and we need you to go see if you can help them out." And the weather was absolutely dog shit that day, a layer of clouds down to one thousand feet, and what it was, kind of the same circumstances. This was in '72, I guess. No, it couldn't have been '72, had to be in '70. Early '70. I'm gonna look at the dates here. There was an Army LRRP, Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, they were inserted up along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, pretty close to Mu Gia pass, where the trail came in Laos from North Vietnam, doing reconnaissance. And unfortunately, some of the bad guys, a bad guy, probably regular North Vietnamese, figured out where they were, and they were in contact enough that they were getting shot at, and they were trying to avoid getting shot at so they called to whoever they talked to and said, "We need some help," so I was by myself and I went in, under the weather and I found where they were, and again, I'm not sure, I must have talked to them. They must have had a UHF radio of some sort because that's all I had. But the bad guys were far enough away that I could see where they were shooting at them, but unfortunately they started shooting at me. I made several passes, with my twenty-mike-mike, which only had six hundred rounds, and at six thousand rounds a minute you don't have a lot. And the weather was so bad that I had to go up, go back find a hole in the clouds, come back up the valley, I did that until I ran out of bullets. Then I went out and hit the tanker, and I did this two or three times, got gassed up, came back in, found them again, and just made passes. Fast and jinking and low enough that they were much rather

shoot at me than the guys wanting to shoot down an airplane. And I don't think they had anything but small arms and .50 cal, nothing bigger than that. I'm going four hundred knots, I'm pulling five or six G's all the time, I'm jinkin', I may have taken a couple of small arms hits in the tail, I don't remember, frankly. But after several hours, it was enough that either, I can't remember, either they were able to get away and disengage, and then they got picked up later. But they were able, me getting the bad guys to shoot at me instead of them.

Schwan: Did the jets come on station?

Pratt: No, no, I was the only one, but after I left, there was another F-4 that came in and did the same thing for another hour or so, and I think these guys were able to get out. The Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol was able to disengage, because the Vietnamese were more worried about shooting at us than at them. And so they were able to disengage, and then they were picked up and eventually came home. And I'm thinking that they're the ones that put me in for the Silver Star. They put in the paper work up through the chain, got up to Da Nang of course

Schwan: A lot of times those guys walked out.

Pratt: I don't know how they got out. They either walked out or got where they were gonna get picked up, but they were pretty far north.

Schwan: We linked up with them a few times.

Pratt: Yeah, but they were fairly far north, so that's the...I've got the award elements there, that talks about that. There's one other that had to do again, with Laos. Another war story, again when I was flying the "Stormy" FAC mission. I mentioned earlier there was the F-100 FACs, or "Misty" FACs...in the time Laos was kind of divided, not by the lines on the ground but geographically, the "Misty" FACs flew here, and the "Stormy" FACs flew here, and the "Wolf" FACs -- out of Ubon -- flew here, and the "Laredo" FACs -- out of Udorn -- flew here. And I was flying around FACing one day, and you know, probably recce-ing the trail, not doing anything spectacular, looking for trucks, looking for truck parts. And I heard a couple of beepers. When you ejected, when your chute deployed, also your emergency locator beacon went off on UHF guard, 2430, so you head the beeper and you knew that either a beeper got inadvertently turned on or somebody just jumped out of an airplane. So I heard a couple of beepers and I figured that somewhere that somebody had jumped out of an airplane. And a few minutes later, sure enough, airborne command control airplane called me, said "Hey we've got a "Misty" down one hundred miles south of you, why don't you go down and be around if he needs help." I said "Sure," so I popped up and headed down and they set up a tanker. So I really...I'm sitting there with...I've got twenty mike-mike and I've got some Willie Petes, that's all I've got. And so I just go to the tanker, and I sit there and just orbit, and every half hour or so

I fill up on gas, just in case I'm needed. Well, normally the out-of-country search and rescue protocol was for the same thing in-country, the airplanes that would lead the rescue effort were the "Sandys", A-1E's and A-1H's, which is an old WWII fighter, Navy airplanes. But they were great big radial, prop on the front, and they could carry just a whole bunch of munitions, and the "Sandy" was their search and rescue version. And they would come in, four or eight of them, or two or four of them, and then the Jolly Greens -- the HH-53 Jolly Green helicopters -- would be the ones that would come in and do the pickup. Well, these two F-100s that got shot down in "Misty", and both these guys jumped out, and they were on the ground, and the bad guys were around and the bad guys knew where they were, so they were shooting at them. And the "Sandys" came in, and...the "Sandys" would come in, make contact, figure out where the guys on the ground were, and they would be the ones that would suppress the fire, and they would be the ones that would call the Jolly's in when the fire got suppressed, and then they would come in, and figure out where they were, and pick them up to get out of there. Well I'm sitting up there orbiting, and the "Sandys" are on station, it took them an hour, it takes a while for all that to get to Laos. These guys on the ground, I can hear them talking to the powers that be, and the "Sandys" show up, and the guy that's the lead "Sandy," guy that runs the whole town, he's got probably four A-1's with him, with ordnance to drop on the bad guys. They call him 'Sandy Low Lead', he's the head of the low "Sandys", four "Sandys" are above him, 'Sandy Low Lead' was in charge of the whole thing. You know, where are we dropping the bombs, where the bad guys are, where we're putting the napalm, etcetera. Either it happened, right when, I can't remember, but at some point when they were trying to set the SAR up, 'Sandy Low Lead' lost coms with the guys on the ground. They were on UHF, the brick they had, the emergency radio was the UHF. And he couldn't talk to them on the UHF, and that's all they had, they didn't have Victor, they didn't have fox mike. And I could hear them fine, so I'm sitting up there and I said, "'Sandy,' 'Stormy,' I'm sitting up here and I can hear those guys fine if you need help." and he said, "Why don't you come down and see if you can help us out." So I was in an F-4, F-4 doesn't like to fly much slower than about three hundred knots on a good day, especially when it's loaded and heavy with gas. The "Sandys" like to do probably a hundred and fifty, maybe one-eighty on a good day. So I went down, and I'm in there, amongst them with the "Sandys," talking with the guys on the ground. I've got Willie Petes, I'm marking the bad guys for the "Sandys", I'm in an F-4, and I'm probably two hundred and fifty knots, staggering around trying not to fall out of the sky, marking for the "Sandys," and I did that for probably an hour until another "Sandy" showed up that is a leader that can take over, and I'm up and out of there, and he goes in there and takes over. End result, one of the Jollys got shot down, they've got guys on the ground. And so they eventually, they brought another Jolly in, they picked everybody up, actually the first jolly, the hoist got shot off, so the PJ was on the ground. So they've got the PJ and the two F-100 guys on the ground, they eventually brought another Jolly in with the "Sandys", and they picked them all up and they came home. Nobody

lost. They lost an F-100 and a Jolly. I didn't know who these guys were, so a year later, fast forward, I'm in the stag bar at Tucson, Arizona, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, called the Polynesian room, having a drink, and I'm sitting there regaling this guy, my newfound friend at the bar, about this mission I was on where all this happened, and I went through it again. I hear this guy over behind me who'd been listening, and he says, "Hey, that was me!" And that was the F-100 guy, his name was Don Mueller, Colonel Mueller. He's passed away, God rest his soul. He had been the guy in the "Misty" that got shot down, and I'm the one that ran that whole thing. We became fast friends ever after, he retired as a colonel like I said, and he passed away a couple years ago.

Schwan: That's fascinating.

Pratt: Small world.

Schwan: It's important to put that in perspective. And that's the most important part of Vietnam, your time in Vietnam.

Pratt: Like I said, I did two tours at Da Nang, and then a few months at Takhli. And Takhli wasn't very long, we were only in the air about three months. They had deployed a squadron that was in line back before us, and then the war kind of wound down after that, and we were there about three months. We were supposed to be there for six or eight months as they started up a rotation to bring new squadrons in, but things started winding down so they brought us home.

Schwan: How did you feel you were treated when you were home? Or were you mostly on Air Force bases so you were left alone?

Pratt: We were pretty much left alone. I was in the Air Force, and we didn't wear our uniforms downtown. Not because we didn't want to, we just didn't do it. We were in flight suits all the time, and you legally couldn't, the Air Force at the time you could only wear your flight suit to and from work and at work. Back in the '60s if you wanted to stop at the local 7/11 and pick up a six-pack of Coke on the way home, you weren't allowed to in a flight suit, it was verboten. As a matter of fact, when I was first stationed at Eglin Air Force Base, which is still there today, there was a...the main base was up towards the north side, up near the town of Valparaiso and Nashville, and the TAC unit, it wasn't a TAC base it, was a systems command base where they did a lot of training and a lot of weapons tests, and they still do today. But our side of the base was a TAC base, and we were down on the south side of one of the runways. And if we wanted to go, we'd go to work, obviously in our flight suits, work in the plane in our flight suits, but if we wanted to go to the officer's club on the main base after work to have a drink, we weren't legally allowed to wear our flight suits, we had to bring a regular uniform and change into that before we could go to the bar. It's completely changed now, but this was in

the mid '60s. So flight suits were pretty much verboten except for at work. So we never hung around in them, and we didn't hang around the main base very often because we didn't want to bring another uniform to work to change into.

Schwan: How did you feel the attitude was of the population at that point? Or weren't you exposed to it?

Pratt: Well, frankly the population...I guess, well we weren't. I was stationed in Florida and places like that, and there weren't a lot of anti-war demonstrations, etcetera. So we weren't really exposed to that very often. Mainly, the population around the airbase pretty much liked us, we were good for the economy and stuff like that. And down in Florida, very conservative, and Arizona is fairly conservative. So we weren't in San Francisco or wherever, Chicago, wherever a lot of the anti-war stuff was happening. So we weren't exposed to that very much.

Schwan: What...I mean, you've got a list of tremendous assignments. What are the high points of them?

Pratt: Well, you know, people ask me, what assignment I like best, and I say all of them. I wasn't married for, you know, the first ten, twelve years. Joyce and I were married in '78 and I came in in '64 and I retired in '97, so the first third we weren't married. But we both say we never had a bad assignment. There were different assignments, as I progressed, that were good for different reasons. When we got married I was at Hickam, I was stationed in Hawaii, Joyce was there, had moved there from New Jersey, the cold weather ran her out. We met, got married, and had our first son there. Went back to MacDill Air Force Base, I'd been there before, and that's where I got a squadron. First real command if you will. You want another war story? Have you got lots of time, John?

Schwan: Yeah, I've got lots of time. As you can tell, I'm just sucking it in and enjoying it, even though I view things from a different place.

Pratt: Well, you had a different...you pretty much were in just for the war, right? You entered the Army, lieutenant, went into the war, got your ass shot off, survived, did great things while you were there for your country, but came home and then that was pretty much it. Is that right?

Schwan: Yeah, well, I'll give you...this is not important for the interview, but, I got home and I had been a distinguished graduate from OCS, and so they asked if I wanted to be a captain and go back to Vietnam. And I said, "Yeah, that's good with me." And I'd periodically been a platoon leader, XO, company commander, so I went home and told Beth who you know, and she said, "You know," and at that point the first Cav was getting a lot of PR of the negative kind,

about the contact. And we subsequently found out that the contact was six months old, because I would tell her "Yeah, I remember being there," but she said "I couldn't take it, another tour," and I said, "You know, I need to make money," so, I'm fine with that. I don't have an issue.

Pratt: You know, people ask me, and I find up to a point this is true, "Why did you stay in the Air Force, did you ever have stars in your eyes?" And my flippant answer is, "Frankly, I was always too lazy to go over to personnel and ask them how to get out of this chickenshit outfit, and they kept promoting me!" [Laughs].

Schwan: When did you...like I say, I was nothing but a grunt.

Pratt: I understand that.

Schwan: So I don't understand a lot of this, these titles and whatnot. When did you actually quit flying?

Pratt: When I retired. I was flying, not all the time, but when I was at USAFE headquarters as a vice commander, from '94 to '97, I retired in '97. When I first got there, I checked out in the Learjet, which we call...I forget what they call it, just a VIP transport. And I did that for a while just to get flying time, but I said, it's not a lot of fun, because we didn't really do much. And I never really flew the VIP's around, I just...we'd going flying, so I went, "This is no fun, I'd rather do something for real." So the Air Force had a squadron of C-130s at Ramstein, it was the only C-130 squadron permanently stationed, I mean hell, they were C-130E's which had been in the Air Force as long as I was. So I said, "I think I'll get checked out in a 130," because we had Bosnia and were going in and stuff like that. So I came back to Little Rock Air Force Base and got a few flights in the C-130 and got a few simulators and checked out, and came back and...and at the time, it used to be that generals could fly wherever they wanted to as long as they had an instructor pilot with them. And Tony McPeak, who was the chief at the time, changed that, because there had been a couple of aircraft accidents where generals had been killed, not with a lot of time in the airplane. So Tony said, new rule is -- good rule I think -- if a general wants to fly he's got to be current, and have a current check ride in that airplane, still have to fly with an instructor pilot, but he has to have gone through the training. So I got checked out, took the check ride, passed my check ride, but then when I flew, I'd be in the left seat the instructor would be in the right.

Schwan: Ever fly a C-7 alpha?

Pratt: C-7s, no. I've been in them, Caribou. I've been in them in Vietnam, but I never flew them. In Vietnam all I really flew was F-4's and TE-4 "Playboy" Marine Skyhawks. And I

flew in C-7s, C-123s, C-47s, C-130s. Whatever, we weren't flying them. We were just passengers.

[1:38:00] Break in Interview [1:52:45]

I was going to tell a story. That's all I've been doing all morning is telling stories. It was in the context of highlights, and I think most of the highlights revolve around command billets, which kind of make sense, I guess. And we talked about how I became a wing commander, and I'll give you a couple of highlights of that, and what I felt was good and bad and what we can take away from that later.

Schwan: And what you felt about it, which is most important.

Pratt: Exactly.

Schwan: Different levels of responsibility.

Pratt: Exactly. Exactly. And I've got one as a squadron commander. First, I'll give you the story about how I became a squadron commander. I told you how I became a wing commander. So how did I get a squadron? Well, the long story...the short story is because I knew somebody who knew somebody, but it didn't really work that way. Joyce and I got married in Hawaii when I was a major, while I was there I made lieutenant colonel, below the zone, which is early, because at the time in the Air Force, I'm not trying to pat my back, but the leadership starts...you start getting identified leadership positions when you start making promotions below the zone, because you're supposed to be the top 10% or whatever the number is. Any rate, I show up at MacDill Air Force Base in an F-4 training unit, RTU -- Replacement Training Unit -- we had four squadrons, and they all trained F-4 pilots. All the people in the squadron were instructor pilots, Instructor Weapons Systems Officers, IWSOs. Remember I used GIB earlier, guy in the back, the Air Force finally got smart and took the pilots out of the back, put navigators in the back, call them Weapons Systems Operators, WSO, so we had IPs, Instructor Pilots, and IWSOs Instructor Weapons Systems Officers in the squadron. Any rate, so I come back to MacDill, I'm a major, soon to be a lieutenant colonel, they got four squadrons, don't really have a job, they have a bunch of guys like me hanging around. So I get stuck in one of the squadrons as an assistant ops officer, which is third level down, would be, like I explained earlier, a major which is junior to a lieutenant colonel. I'm sitting there flying, got checked out in the F-4, they've got four squadrons, and the wing at MacDill was an F-4 wing, it was going to become an F-16 wing, early on in the F-16 history. And so they converted squadrons one, two, three, four, down the line. And everybody is an F-4 guy, so they've got to send some folks to F-16 school. And the first person, the first couple people to go to F-16 school, to come back and start standing the wing up, were very key positions. One was director of standardization and evaluation, which ran the checking everybody out and getting them

trained. And the second position was going to be the first guy, the first ops officer, number two position, in the first F-16 squadron, which is a plum of a position. So I'm in the running for that job. The wing commander was a guy named Ike Canterbury, good guy, retired two-star, Air Force Academy graduate. First Air Force Academy graduate to be in the Thunderbirds. Good pilot, but he was the wing commander. I didn't know Colonel Canterbury very well, I mean, I'm a major in the squadron. But I didn't know the vice wing commander, a gentleman named Stan Lockley. Stan had been my flight commander at George Air Force Base. When I was previously in a training unit, when I was a Captain, Stan was a major, and he and I got along and I worked for him. Stan's the number two guy in the wing. Stan, unbeknownst to me, he's whispering my name into Canterbury's ear, I'm on the list he's looking at. And so, they're about to make the selection, Friday afternoon, I'm going to fly, I'm getting ready to go out to fly and I get a call. Our squadron is right next to wing Headquarters. And I got a call from the wing commander's exec, who said, "Major Pratt, General Canterbury would like to see you if you've got a few minutes." I said "Yeah, sure, I've got ten minutes before I have to leave, so I'll come on over." Well, I went over, spent about ten minutes, pleasant conversation "How you doing Ev? What's happening? What are you doing this afternoon? What do you think?" You know, standard questions like that. I leave. I get back from flying, flying in the afternoon, there was a note to call Lockley. And Stan said, "You stupid bastard, what have you been doing?" and I said, "What did I do, Colonel Lockley?" Well, apparently, way back Vietnam times, we all went to Thailand, went to Bangkok and places, and bought jewelry. And I bought what's called a Baht chain, it was a gold chain around your neck. And I had one on, I normally kept it tucked under my t-shirt, because wearing a Baht chain showing was not within uniform regulation amendments. Unfortunately, when I'd gone in to see Canterbury, my Baht chain was showing. [Laughs]. So when I left, he went over to see Lockley and said, "Who is this guy who doesn't even know how to put on the uniform correctly and you want me to send off to F-16 school, you've got to be shitting me, Stan!" So the next week, they announced the guy that was going to be the first ops officer of the first F-16 squadron, and his name wasn't Pratt. So I got sent off to be the assistant ops officer in one of the last squadrons that was going to be converted to F-16s. I'm sitting there, put my head down, do the best job I can as an assistant ops officer. That's who I am. And we had an inspection, called an MEI, Management Effectiveness Inspection, where they would come in from the higher headquarters, and the inspector general would come in and spend a week inspecting the wing, and we'd do our thing. Kind of like an Operational Readiness Inspection, but different. So he comes in, the Tactical Air Command inspector general was a man named Ernie Bedke, he was a one-star. Retired as a two-star and just died, died on Christmas day of this year, in fact. He had been the wing commander in MacDill on my first tour, and I knew him. So I'm an assistant ops officer major, MEI hits, he's there with his inspection team, and I'm sitting out on a Saturday morning during the inspection, and we're having an air defense exercise to check our ability to do our defense mission. And I was a

supervisor of flying for the wing, which meant I sat out in the middle of the air field by myself in this little old fire station that had radios, And I was the representative, if anything happened I'd call the command post, so I'm supervising the whole flying for the morning. So it's about six-thirty on a Saturday morning, and I'm sitting there by myself and General Bedke walks in, sits down, "How you doing Ev?" "How you doing sir?" So we talk for a while, and watch the airplanes take off. He said, "What's going...what your plan? What's going to happen to you?" I said, "Well I'm not sure General Bedke. I'm an assistant ops officer right now in the 63rd squadron, I hope to be an ops officer pretty soon, and if everything works out I can eventually get a squadron." He kind of frowned and he said...and I'm about to pin on lieutenant colonel, he said, "Hell, you don't want to do that. Do you mind where you go to be a squadron commander?" I said, "No, anywhere, I'll be a squadron commander anywhere in the world, just give me a squadron command." He said, "You remember Colonel Rogers?" I said "Yeah," this guy named Buck Rogers, who...back to my first tour in Da Nang, when Bedke was a wing commander, Rogers was the director of operations, so I knew him then. He now is the wing commander at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, the F-4 unit in Goldsboro, North Carolina. He said, "You want to go to Seymour?" I said, "I'd love to go to Seymour to be a squadron commander." He picks up the phone, calls the command post, said "Get me the Seymour command post. Seymour? It's General Bedke, let me talk to Rogers. Okay, well I guess that sorry son of a bitch is sleeping in or something, when he comes to work have him give me a ring." He say, "See you Ev," and he leaves. About two weeks later, the now vice wing commander in the wing, Eugene Vock? [2:02:34], Lockley had left, he came over one day and he said, "Ev, do you know Colonel Rogers, wing commander over at Seymour?" I said, "Yes, I worked for him." He said, "You know he called up Colonel Canterbury and wanted you to come to Seymour and become a squadron commander? And Colonel Canterbury said, "You're not stealing my good guys to be squadron commanders, Buck! I'll take care of my good guys." [Both laugh]. And so, about a month later I got a squadron at MacDill. So I went from the dumps, to getting a squadron.

Schwan: To being in heaven.

Pratt: To being in heaven. So, I wouldn't mind, I mean I don't know if General Canterbury, he's still alive, I don't know if he'll see this. I hope he doesn't! [Laughs]. But that's how I got to be a squadron commander. But the highlight of that tour was something I learned along the way, and that had to do with motivation. The squadron I became squadron commander of was the Thirteenth Squadron, and of the four squadrons at MacDill it was going to be the last squadron to convert to the F-16, and this process was about a two, two-and-a-half-year process. Because they had to convert the squadron, they had to transition the guys that were going to transition to the F-16, into the F-16 and they would start training students, they had all these navigators, there was those who worked in...the F-16 was a single seat pilot,

didn't need them. So they'd move them down to the next squadron or they'd get them assignments, then the second squadron would convert, and then the third squadron, and then the last squadron to convert was going to be the Thirteenth Squadron, which I was commander of. So, think about it. Most of the guys in my squadron, one were the navs that didn't get assigned somewhere else, that were gonna leave when the squadron converted, didn't know where. Or, a lot of the pilots, the instructor pilots I had, were instructor pilots who had been in other squadrons that didn't get converted to the F-16, so they came to me, to be in our squadron until our squadron converted, and then either they'd convert, there was a small chance of that, or they would be shipped off to another assignment. So, did I have a morale problem? I could have. But, I don't know how I did it, John, but somehow I was able to motivate these guys, and convince them that the job we were doing was as important or more as the F-16 guys. And that we were as good or better than they were, and that we could hold our own with them, and that we could keep our heads up. One of the things I told them, and Colonel Canterbury, the wing commander, the one who didn't, and then did, give me a squadron, when he came to fly with the squadrons, he was an ex-Thunderbird, great pilot, and he knew he was a great pilot. Really kind of disrupted operations when he'd come fly with the squadrons. And he was current in both airplanes. But as soon as the wing got a squadron of F-16s, he would much rather fly the F-16s than this beat up F-4s that'd been around for twenty years. And the guys would say "Colonel Canterbury never comes to see us," and I'd say "Guys, count your blessings. [Laughs]. Think about it, would you rather him come in and disrupt my schedule?" "Oh, sir, I guess you're right," and I had to convince them that we were as good as the other guys were. One of the proudest things that we did was we had monthly or quarterly, we called them turkey shoots, where the different squadrons would put together gunnery teams of four guys, and we would go to the gunnery range and have a competition. And come back, and whoever...whichever squadron scored the best -- and we would drop bombs and shoot rockets and strafe -- and we got scores for all of that at the gunnery range. And then we would add them up, and whoever got the best score would be the wing champion until the next turkey shoot, and their name was up on the board, and so it was an important thing to do. Well...the F-4 was not, obviously, as good a bombing air platform as the F-16 because of the change and the technology, the gunsight technology and automation. I mean, clearly, take the exact same pilot and put them in both airplanes on a given day, drop a better bomb in the F-16 than the F-4 just because. So we got handicapped a little, because of that. We didn't come in last all the time, we didn't win very often, but the two turkey shoots before it was going to be our last Turkey shoot, we didn't do well. And it was around Turkey time, you remember a while ago I talked about Mike Ryan, he was a mentor of mine, and a colleague. At the time we were colleagues, he was an F-16 squadron commander and I was an F-4 squadron commander, and he went out and had his guys buy turkey, live turkey. And so, the turkey shoot was like, two weeks before Thanksgiving, and so when we had the presentation of the trophy, which Mike's

squadron won, and we unfortunately came in last, Mike got this turkey and this live turkey is running around. And he gave it to us, we got the turkey for the turkey shoot, so I gave it to one of my young maintainers, I said, "Guys, who's a young airman that wants a turkey for Thanksgiving?" and he took him. So what we did was, one of my squadron commanders, I'm sorry, flight commanders, that Thanksgiving, took his turkey, and after they had their Thanksgiving and were done with the turkey, he took it he boiled it and he put it back together, the bones, and had it mounted in Plexiglas. And the last turkey shoot that we had, before we closed the squadron down the next spring, Thirteenth Squadron won. We beat all the F-16 squadrons, and I was able to take this turkey and, not to Mike, but to one of the other F-16 squadron commanders...we were able to close down the F-4 world MacDill Air Force Base. And somewhere, I've still got a picture, of after we left, there was a plaque mounted inside the main gate in MacDill, riding down towards the squadrons that had the rank order of the squadrons and who won the last turkey shoot. There were no more F-4s at MacDill, but for six months the number one squadron at MacDill, was...

Schwan: Do they still fly the F-16s? The 4 is gone.

Pratt: The F-4 is pretty much gone. The Air Force, they still use them for drones, which they shoot at 'em, they still use some F-16s...F-16 will be around for a long time still. Thunderbirds still fly F-16s, and they've put a lot of money into changing engines and upgrading them, along with, as the F-35 slips out, this grey airplane will be great one of these days, but it's got some problems, they're not going to be able to buy as many because the prices are going up, the standard, as happens with every airplane. They'll be flying F-16s for the foreseeable future, they're much better F-16s than I flew, and they have better engines.

Schwan: So if we are forced to enter into another conflict, which personally I think we will inside of a year, will it be with F-16's?

Pratt: They're flying in the conflict now.

Schwan: Are they? And the 35s?

Pratt: 35s are not really operational yet. The Marines have them, that have just declared operational capability, but they don't really have any online, any online squadrons. The first 35 outfit is a training outfit, as you would expect, and it is just getting gemmed up at Luke Air Force Base, outside of Phoenix.

Schwan: Now during your career, were you involved in a fair number of rifts, where you just had to eliminate personnel?

Pratt: A few, not many...

Schwan: Where I'm going, let me clarify, with the, even with the sequester and all that other crap, are we still able to retain our best pilots like you were?

Pratt: Some would argue I'm not the best pilot...I'd agree with that, guys like Mike Ryan would argue that I'm number two, but at any rate that's another story. I think that they're keeping a lot of good pilots, they're having some problems, as they draw down, the flying time is going down, and when they had this big deal with the budget problems the last few years, when they had to cut back on flying, guys were only flying simulators not airplanes, they're working out of that, a lot of sim time. But the quality of the airplanes, I just can't imagine a youngster not wanting to fly the airplanes that are...I mean John, when I was a captain, you know, I'd get up in the morning and say I'm taking off from George Air Force Base at six o'clock in the morning with a flight of four, going to the gunnery range to drop bombs, and I'm leading, and I look over my shoulder and there's not a breath of air and the sun's coming up and, you know, I'd say "They pay me to do this, I'm getting paid to do this!" And I'm hoping the youngsters today feel the same way. But frankly, they're incentivizing them now. I can't tell you the numbers but they've got some fairly good monetary incentives.

Schwan: To leave?

Pratt: To stay!

Schwan: To stay, oh okay! That's good to know, that's an important message of your discussion.

Pratt: Oh yeah, for the pilots, because the airlines, they're turning over the, sixty-five is the age for retirement now, they've got a huge cohort that is reaching retirement age, and one of their biggest draws is the military. They get a qualified military guy, the money is pretty good, and a lot of the guys are torn between staying in, and maybe not getting to fly as much as they want to, having reduced flying time and having a lot more simulator time than they're used to. Frankly, simulators aren't a lot of fun, I never thought.

Schwan: But they are consciously keeping the best?

Pratt: Absolutely, they try to.

Schwan: I can't imagine not, but I don't think civilians understand fully what's going on with the military.

Pratt: Well, it's not just the pilots, it's the youngsters, it's the maintainers, it's the cops, it's the supply guys. I'll tell you when I was a colonel up through three-star, if I ever got frustrated and I was feeling down in the dumps and I wanted to feel better, I would go somewhere where there were a bunch of youngsters gathered, and I'd talk to them for fifteen

minutes. And, my God, I mean, this is what our country is raising, and look how wonderful they are, and it would just make you feel good. I mean, these are eighteen, nineteen-year-old kids, and they are gung-ho, and they are good, and they believe in their country, and they want to do what they're doing, and they feel good about it. You know? It's just amazing how they can uplift your spirits.

Schwan: As a current civilian, even with my involvement in things military, that's the one thing that concerns me. And that's one of the things that we work on, about helping them when they get back and what not, because they're unbelievable!

Pratt: Absolutely!

Schwan: One of these days, over a beer, I'll explain to you, when they let me go to Ft. Benning to work with my old First Cav unit for a day, I'm not smart enough to be an infantryman now.

Pratt: Well I'm not smart enough to be a fighter pilot! No way, I couldn't get into pilot training anymore!

Schwan: There is no way...I am not qualified, I can live with it. It's probably still nasty, but that's amazing. How much do you miss your career? Well, I want to go into the rest of it, so we won't short cut it, we've got a few minutes here before they get us for lunch. Do you get the opportunity to get back involved with your old friends, and do you get to see and interface with any of the youngsters?

Pratt: Not really. Only with the youngsters I sometimes see with my affiliation with Transition Living Services, TLS Veterans, and with leave no veterans behind. And I do want to get into those organizations later. Because, as the president of TLS Veterans, I spend more time, and frankly the youngsters I see there are the troubled ones, because the ones in need are the ones we help.

Schwan: That's what we see with the Lynch Foundation, and the numbers are...and the issues are disgusting. But let me go back to where I'm going, and you need to follow me now, instead of jumping off into one of your tangents, which you do because you're a general...

Pratt: You don't want any more war stories? [Laughs].

Schwan: No! The war stories I love!

Pratt: They all had a point though, each one had a point!

Schwan: Yes, they did, no question. What worries me, as a civilian, is are you able to impart what you feel to these youngsters, or are we losing the continuity of it?

Pratt: Rephrase that.

Schwan: You would do this again in a minute.

Pratt: In a heartbeat.

Schwan: And you'd go fight in a second.

Pratt: In a heartbeat.

Schwan: Do the new young people get that? Do they understand the tradition, because we're not long on tradition as a country, we're not...we're having a little trouble understanding loyalty, and what it means to serve, this is an opinion, which they can edit out, that's fine. But we are not long on the continuity of it.

Pratt: Well, but, is the Army making their recruiting quotas?

Schwan: Yes.

Pratt: Is the Air Force making their recruiting quotas?

Schwan: Don't know.

Pratt: Yes.

Schwan: Yes.

Pratt: Are the ROTCs full?

Schwan: Yes, having trouble with the reserves, but yes.

Pratt: Of course they can get full ride scholarships now, which is an incentive, but are they tough to get? Yes. I mean, I've got two sons of Joyce's niece, one of them has just pinned on first lieutenant, he's in the Quartermaster Corps at Ft. Drum, headed overseas, his dad was in the Army, got out as a captain, he's an FBI agent now. His younger brother is Western Michigan University, in the ROTC corps, wants to be a paramedic, jump out of airplanes, go to med school and be a doctor, in the Army or the Air Force. And that's just two that I know. And they're wonderful young men! And I've got to assume that the Parris Islands, and the Lacklands and the Army recruiting depots fill up with these young men and women, and they get in the Army, they're all volunteers, John. They're getting in for different reasons, but once they've been in for two or three years...like I say, if I go back and look at these kids like I did fifteen years ago, you can't walk away but feeling good about what it is in the air. I guess I'm a little more optimistic than what I'm hearing you say.

Schwan: This kills me to say it, but the Marines do the best job out of anybody at maintaining the esprit and having organizations that function, I tried to go to the Marine drink around every month, which is in downtown Chicago, but they try to help each other. And you're trying to help, and I'm trying to help, and we can't afford to lose your ability and your love, or mine for that matter. 'Cause we are just...we're the bridge.

Pratt: True.

Schwan: And it worries me that it's not as strong as it needs to be.

Pratt: I'll think about that.

Schwan: You're optimistic about it and I hope you're right.

Pratt: I'm more optimistic, apparently more optimistic than you are.

Schwan: I know how I want it to be, but I just don't know if it's there.

Pratt: I love the Marines, I got a lot of good friends in the Marines, and I love every one of them to pieces, and I know what happens on November the tenth of every year, but we don't need everyone to be Marines.

Schwan: No, not at all. Not at all. We need everyone to be in the First Cav! [Both laugh].

Pratt: You know, I don't...I'm kind of removed, I'm not removed from it, I'm close enough to the veteran part of it, because, as you well know I've got a passion for veterans, you and I both do, that's why we're involved with some of the things we're doing. But I don't stay in touch, I don't go to Air Force association events, I used to when I was working because...I had to because of my job. But I quit going when I quit consulting and I quit working in the industry. And I keep up with some of my close friends that are retired, that I served in the Air Force with. I get the Air Force Association magazine, I'm a member, I read it from cover to cover every month. I'm a member of the Military Officers Association of America, and I read their magazine and see what they're doing for the military in congress and all of that. But I don't really stay close to it, I wouldn't go to the Marine drink around every month, I don't think, if I lived down here. I keep close enough to it to do what I feel like I need to do, but I'm comfortable as long as we keep a viable military, and I think we have. And we can...the country supports it to what the country needs to do to keep us having the defense we need, to do...to fulfill the strategic objectives and the national interests of the US, whatever they may be, I'm not ready to get off to that today, that I'm okay with it. I follow the senior leadership in the Air Force, Mark Welch, I don't know, well, he's a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful speaker. And I'm told he's doing a good job as the Chief. Dave Goldfein, who's the vice chief, I know him well, goes by "Fingers."

Fingers is a great officer, and when we have guys like that in charge, I feel pretty good about the Air Force. I don't know if Fingers will get to be the chief, but I hope he does, he's the vice chief now.

Schwan: So you have faith.

Pratt: I do.

Schwan: So now let's go back to the twenty-year point in your career.

Pratt: Let me see when it was, '64, '74, '84...

Schwan: '84.

Pratt: I was in the Pentagon, going to war college in the Pentagon. Was there for a couple of years when I got the call at four in the morning from Mike Ryan that said you're going to Misawa to be DO, which was the best thing that happened to me when I was at the Pentagon.

Schwan: Most people feel leaving the Pentagon is the best thing that happens to them.

Pratt: Frankly, that was the only tour I had in the Pentagon, those two years. It was a good tour, it was a staff tour, I had to do staff things. I think I added some value to a few things. I think I learned a lot of things, and saw a lot of leaders do a lot of good things and I learned from them, but, frankly, my Pentagon tour was not my favorite tour. It was a good tour, like I said I never had a bad one, but, like I said, my command tours. The squadron command before that, the wing command after that at Kunsan, we haven't talked about that at all. Kunsan is...I learned a couple things about motivation there as well. Now, I've got a point, I promise you there's a point to this story, but Kunsan is a remote tour for the Air Force, it still is. It's a fighter wing on the Yellow Sea, about a hundred miles south or so. It used to be F-4's, F-16s now, and it's a one year tour. Everybody goes there for one year.

Schwan: No family?

Pratt: No family. As a matter of fact, when I went there was talk of the Kunsan six, they were going to take the top six leaders in the wing, who were all colonels, and have us bring our families and put us on a three year tour so we would have some continuity at the top. I was supposed to be the first guy, but that fell through. So everything's a one-year tour. And I mentioned inspections earlier, the big inspection for a combat unit in the Air Force is an Operational Readiness Inspection, ORI, where the IG would come in for a week and take you through the wringer and inspect everything you did, and you'd have these combat exercises, and chem gear exercises, and generate your planes, and you'd fly simulated combat sorties, and

you'd spend a couple days with full chemical MUF-D on, etcetera. And it was tough. And Kunsan had one every year, because it changed every year. And generally it was within three months of the end of the wing commander's tour, because they wanted to give the wing commander that came in eight to nine months to put his imprint on the wing, then give him the inspection, then he had to leave a couple months later, and the new crowd would come in. And most of the senior leadership would rotate kind of at the same time. Well, General Gregory who I mentioned earlier, sent me to Kunsan, he had apparently decided that the wing commander ahead of me had not, and I'm being nice, had not done as good a job with the wing as he had wanted him to be, and he did not give him an ORI. So when I got to Kunsan and took over the wing, it had been over a year since the wing had had an ORI, and there were some issues. It was probably good they didn't because they probably wouldn't have done very well. Both in some underlying leadership and things, and some things in the bowels, and part of it was the aircraft, one of the big things in an ORI for a fighter wing is to have the right maintenance outfit, and, when the IG came in -- all no notice -- it really was no notice. You really didn't know about it until they landed, and the IG got out of the airplane and went up to the wing commander and handed him a letter, and said this is your ORI. And we'd go to combat footing immediately. So General Gregory decided they couldn't do very well in one. And I'd been there about two months, three months, and Gregory came to visit, was there three or four days, and we were riding around in a car right before he was leaving and he said "Are you ready for an ORI yet, Ev?" and I said, "No sir, we're not." And I'd only been there a couple months. I said, "Give me about three months and then I'll be ready." He says, "Can't wait three months. IG will be here next week, don't tell anybody. Just you. But the IG team will be here next week, do the best you can." "Yes sir." So I didn't tell a soul. So I knew a week before that we were having an ORI, and when they showed up I acted surprised along with everybody else. And we did okay, but we didn't do very well, we didn't pass with flying colors. We didn't pass. Mainly it was because of the aircraft generation, which I was still working on. So they left, and so what they do is they say we'll be back in three months, or four months or whatever, and they give you a recheck. So a week after they left, of course we were going to have to get ready, didn't know when but we knew it was going to be soon. And the wing was pretty much down in the dumps, you know, this whole wing of folks, four thousand people, and we had flunked an inspection. So I had two meetings, because I wanted to get everybody, guys on the nightshift, with the whole wing in attendance. Got up in a big flatbed, and the theme of my talk was: you guys and gals didn't flunk the ORI, I did. My ORI, I'm in charge, I'm responsible, I'm accountable, I did not get you ready for that inspection, so don't feel bad about it. Wasn't your fault. If I had done my job I would have had you ready and we would have passed it. Well we didn't. My fault. Now I need you to help me get ready, so when they come back, I can pass ORI. Are you with me or against me? Of course the speech was longer than that, but that was about it. And of course they were with me, and we worked our ass off twenty-four/seven for the next three

months. And when they came back, I didn't pass ORI, we did. I gave them full credit for everything, because I didn't do anything, hell I'm just a colonel sitting up here watching. And they did it and they passed it. I think that's one of the things that I had learned and tried to teach people later on: you need to embrace failure and acknowledge success. Because success can't be yours...if you claim credit for success, you have failed your people and you are not a good leader. That's one of the things I try to teach, as I grew up, and continue to grow up and have youngsters who work for me. When you come to work in the morning and your people aren't happy, they don't have a problem, you have a problem. You've got to figure out what's wrong, and you've got to figure out how to fix it, and when it gets fixed, they're the ones that have to know that they did it, not you. Leadership 101, Pratt.

Schwan: Absolutely.

Pratt: So that's what I learned at Kunsan.

BREAK

Part 2

Pratt: Okay, where were we?

Schwan: Okay, where we were is really the Pentagon, and what happened after the Pentagon. And then your story about how you ended up getting the promotion into wing and etcetera.

Pratt: Right. So, I was at Kunsan for a year, I told you the story about the ORI and the motivation of the people...but, you know, I had a great time there. I think I learned a lot...you know, when you're forced into a situation, forced is not the right word, put in a situation where you're the...you know, you own, basically, five thousand bodies, and their welfare and their being, and all that they do, you know, you kinda...you put up or you shut up. And you either do well or you don't, and I guess I did well 'cause they...they just...at that time in the Air Force, the -- we'll get to this maybe today or the next day -- the path to general officer, in the fighter world -- and remember that the Air Force, up until probably ten, twelve, fifteen, maybe...well, pretty much up until now, before then, that doesn't make sense, "Now, before then," -- the Air Force has generally been led by either fighter guys or bomber guys. And the path to general officer, in both worlds, was to reach wing command, and succeed. Now, I've got friends that reached wing command and succeeded and never made brigadier, and I've got some that did, and I've got some that did that shouldn't have [unintelligible [3:31] about three things. But...so, as I did what I did at Kunsan, with ORIs and all that, and basically, in my view, ran

operations...running a pretty good wing, and I turned over a fairly...a fairly good operation to my...the guy that replaced me, after I'd been there a year. You know, I felt pretty good about it. I felt like that we had done good work, and that we were still helping do what we needed to do for the defense of our great nation on the Korean peninsula, and we got it done, so...

Schwan: Did any of those pilots end up going to Iraq?

Pratt: Well, as a matter of fact the current...do you mean Iraq now, or Iraq then?

Schwan: Iraq then.

Pratt: Well, I'm sure they did, but I can't...I can't put my finger on one, the gentleman named C. Q. Brown, who's a three-star now -- he's the commander of Central Air Forces, and basically in the Mideast now -- was a second lieutenant, first lieutenant, in one of the squadrons. I sent him an email when he either got his second or third star. I got his email address and...his squadron commander was a wonderful officer named Frank Wille? [5:09], who retired as a colonel. And I said, "C. Q., Frank Wille? [5:16] and I used to sit around at Kunsan drinkin' beer and figuring out which ones of our lieutenants were gonna be worth a shit, and you're one of 'em. Congratulations!" [Both laugh]. And he was good kid, as a lieutenant, flying F-16s. And clearly the Air Force still thinks he's a good kid.

Schwan: So it was...you guys were earmarking him way back then?

Pratt: Well, you kinda did. You kinda...we called 'em our babies. I had -- from the time I was a lieutenant colonel -- I didn't steer 'em, but I kept up with 'em, because I wasn't in a position to steer anybody, and I don't know if steer is a good word or not, but to watch after anybody that's probably a colonel, or maybe a one-star, but...I can name you several youngsters -- to me, then -- that I thought a lot of, and kinda watched out for 'em and made sure they were watched out for, that retired as three and/or four-stars. And you had your babies, and you were happy for 'em when they did well, and when they didn't do well you were sad for 'em.

Schwan: Now, were you an oddity, as a ROTC officer that made lieutenant general?

Pratt: Not really.

Schwan: No?

Pratt: I don't think so. Let's see...

Schwan: So the Air Force Academy wasn't one of the litmus tests?

Pratt: No. John Jumper, who was the chief of staff after Mike Ryan...Mike Ryan was an academy graduate. Johnny went to VMI...he was a chief. Tony McPeak, who was the chief in

the...when I left Kunsan, so that would've been '89 to '92 or so. Tony was an aviation cadet, he had joined before without a degree. Way back when, the Air Force...they used to bring...if you didn't have a degree, you could be an aviation cadet, go to pilot training, if you passed, they'd make you an officer, even without a degree. And he did that, that's the way he came up, and...but then he got a degree, obviously later on. I'm probably odd in that I'm one of the few...few guys that I know that don't...I don't have a master's degree. I never...never bothered, and I don't think you, and now, as a matter of fact, the Air Force went through a time period where they went back and forth between masking advanced degrees in promotion folders, so people wouldn't give too much credence on "This guy doesn't have a master's, this guy does, they're both equal, so promote this guy." They don't want that to happen. But not a lot of general officers that I know of don't have master's degrees.

Schwan: That's an oddity, when I was...a few years ago, down at Fort Hood, virtually every sergeant had a degree. And every senior sergeant had an advanced degree. And every officer...

Pratt: Had advanced degrees.

Schwan: ...had advanced degrees.

Pratt: Well, you know, like I said, they go back and forth on that. It's funny, they...a good friend of mine still...not only do I not have a master's degree, I didn't graduate from high school. Now, what happened was, when I went to Emory at Oxford, they had an early admissions program, so I basically skipped a year in high school, skipped my senior year, went to college -- which is a dumb idea, never send a boy to college when he's sixteen, way too young -- but...and I got a certificate of equivalency, but I don't...I don't formally have a high school degree. [Laughs].

Schwan: That's funny.

Pratt: So, this good buddy of mine always talks about how I'm the only general on the scene that never graduated from high school, which I didn't do. But...they, you know, it was...and I'm not sure where the Air Force is on that now, about the advanced degrees, but...

Schwan: Now you once...and, one thing I will tell you is, I actually forget very little, just don't remember it in order anymore. You once told me in a conversation, when I was kidding you and said, "Do you wanna go back in and fly?" You said "That's for the young guys, I couldn't."

Pratt: Well...

Schwan: And I was gonna, I... we were not in a position where I could discuss it with you.

Pratt: The issue with...I mean, I'd love to go back, you know, I see an F-16 and I miss it. But, to be a pilot that is proficient, you have to do it a lot. And that's what's wrong, if you look at the general aviation accident rates in the U.S., why it's so high is that these guys get private pilot's licenses and get an instrument rating, and fly three or four hours a month, then they go up and they go bust their ass because they're not proficient. It's a skill set that is very, very, very perishable. And you've gotta do it a lot to be really good at it. Now you could not fly a lot, and what we call "ham fist" it. You know, have a ham here instead of an arm.

Schwan: Right.

Pratt: But to be good and proficient at flying, especially in the fighter world, you've gotta do it a lot, and you've gotta keep up with it, because if you get away from it, the skill set atrophies. I mean, you don't lose your spatial orientation, or your ability to know where you are in space, but the ability...the motor skills, does that make sense?

Schwan: Yes.

Pratt: Especially today, and the technology that's in the airplane, and how complicated it is to learn all that stuff. I mean, even when I flew the F-16, when it was...hell, this was twenty years ago, John, when it was fairly rudimentary in terms of the things that were in it. But there were things in there that the airplane was able to do, if you were...so I only flew the F-16 as a colonel, I never flew it as a line-pilot, so I flew, but I didn't fly as much as those guys did. But there were things the airplane did that I couldn't do, 'cause I never...I never had the time to go to the simulator and spend two hours a day...I was a wing commander, you know, I had to run a wing. And I didn't have time to go get in a simulator and do this stuff, or fly as much as I wanted to. So you couldn't keep up with the technology, and you couldn't keep...they used to call it -- in the F-16 -- you got a...the control stick is not in the middle like original fighters were, it's over here, it's called a side-stick controller, it's here. It's full of buttons, and things that you do different, and the throttle grip is here, and its got a dozen buttons and switches, and things you push and pull and tweak, and it makes different things happen in your displays, and sets up different weapons, etcetera. And they call it 'playing the piccolo.' You have to be able to play the piccolo to...because it's, I mean, a lot of different things you can do with both hands and you can do with your feet, and...and like today in the F-35, I mean, my God, they've got these half-million dollar helmets, like wearing a computer on your head, that, when everything is synchronized, and is all calibrated, they can...they have infrared...

Schwan: Like the Clint Eastwood movie?

Pratt: Exactly, and, I mean, they can look down and see the ground under 'em, through the airplane, basically through their display on the helmet. But actually what they're seeing is an...are infrared images, that a camera has taken, it sends it up to the airplane, the computers

play with it, send it to the computer in your helmet, and where you're looking, it synchronizes all of that, and that's what you can see. So you can see all around the airplane. And to be able to do that, [coughs] to be able to do that really requires more time than I would be able to do that. You know, also I'm deaf in one ear, you know I can't see twenty-twenty anymore, and stuff like that. So, from a physical thing, for a seventy-two-year-old man...I mean, I could fly the airplane, I could get in an F-16 tomorrow, and if I remembered how to crank it up, which I think I can remember how to crank it up, I could fly it. Not an issue. But I couldn't use it to perform...I couldn't use it as a weapons system. I couldn't go in combat, and either fly air-to-air combat or air-to-ground combat, and have the machine perform like it needs to do to do what it's supposed to do. Does that make sense?

Schwan: Yes. Because I was curious about that because we are of a similar age, and I always kid myself that you can...you can always be an infantryman, but the reality is you can't do it.

Pratt: Yeah. Can you...so you'd suffer the hundred-pound backpack on, tromping around in the...

Schwan: No, because of my knees, number one, but number two, no. Now if they put me someplace, probably...if they put me in a foxhole, I'll fight.

Pratt: Oh yeah. Absolutely.

Schwan: There's no question about that, and I can get my attitude back...but I'd need to go back to a Holiday Inn at the end of the battle [Pratt laughs], and have a shower and watch Fox news, and, you know...

Pratt: Exactly. Like we were talking about at lunch, the friendly competition amongst the services, you know the kick on the Air Force is that we always have to have our officer's clubs and our swimming pools and our golf courses, because we always get to go back at the end of the day and spend the night in air-conditioned billets etcetera, while you grunts are all out in the middle of a battlefield.

Schwan: Well I'll give you one quickie, that won't take our time, that you'll appreciate.

Pratt: Okay.

Schwan: The First Cav moved from the DMZ, in the A Shau, down to the Iron Triangle.

Pratt: Right.

Schwan: Which was outside of Bien Hoa, basically. And so I was the senior first lieutenant, and...so the other XO's tended to adhere to what I wished to do. And so, I'd tell 'em that any infantry which used to tick us off, was outside of the wire...

Pratt: Right.

Schwan: ...on the base, and rightly so. But I'd tell the guys, look, I said, they ain't gonna throw mortars at us, they don't really care, they want those planes.

Pratt: Exactly.

Schwan: So let's get serious. Me, or fifty million dollars or whatever they are. So we...the Army moved us in their typical bizarre manner. And so we get there and I said, well, they got an officer's club on Bien Hoa. And I said I heard it's unbelievable, and we oughta go there. Now none of us had any insignias on, because they were silly, but we wore dog tags, so I go to the Air Force officer's club with the other XO's, and I said, "Well, we wanna come in and get something to eat." And we had a problem being unarmed, even though it was in the middle of the Air Force base, Bien Hoa...I mean it's a huge place, you were probably there.

Pratt: Oh yeah, I've been to Bien Hoa, yeah.

Schwan: Unbelievable, so we're in there, and I walk in and we were a tad aggressive, and this lieutenant colonel comes up to me and he says, "Is there a problem?" I said, "Yeah, they wanna take our weapons, number one, and number two they would like us to clean up." And I explained to him where we were, and what we just came back from, and he could tell that...he had done this before, he says, "John, come over here." I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "Here's what we're gonna do. You're gonna put your weapons in my office, you're gonna go get a shower, and there's gonna be no trouble with you guys at all, and you'll pay for nothing." [Both laugh]. And I went back out to the other lieutenants, and I said, "This gentleman is our friend, and we're gonna do exactly what we say, and if you idiots say one word, you're outta here!" [Both laugh].

Pratt: Well, like I said about Da Nang earlier, in the officer's club there, they had a place where you could check your weapon when you came in.

Schwan: That part isn't part of the transcript.

Pratt: It can be. But you could check your weapon, but they would ask -- we had a lot of Marines come in, you know, we were in Marine country in Da Nang -- and they'd come in, and we loved 'em, they knew they were loved, and they could do whatever the hell they wanted to. It was wild in there, really, really wild. It was open twenty-four/seven, the kitchen was open twenty-four/seven, and they had a...when I would eat about four times a week, when I was

flying in the day...we would go there at the evening and they had a couple of big fire pits, twenty-four/seven, to cook steaks on. And we'd get a steak for about a buck, and get a bottle of -- I don't know why -- but all we drank wine-wise, was Mateus rosé that came in those funny lookin' bottles, Portuguese wine, get a steak and a bottle of Mateus rosé, and have that guy with that steak, and then go to bed.

Schwan: But that guy never...we were down there for about four months, and he never forgot us.

END [19:59]

Pratt: The Silver Star was the...when I was...

Schwan: Where you stayed on.

Pratt: Where I helped the LRRP team. We talked about that. And the one DFC, of the four I've got that I remember, was when we did the...basically a resupply mission to a team up in...deep in North Vietnam.

Schwan: That was a LRRP team?

Pratt: I'm not sure it was a LRRP.

Schwan: Because you mentioned a LRRP team.

Pratt: Well, the LRRP team was the Silver Star, the DFC, if I remember correctly, as we discussed, that there was a crowd called Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies Observation Group, they all wore civilian clothes they were all spooks. They were all Special Forces, they were delta whatever. And they did a lot of stuff, it's all been declassified, it was top secret at the time, but they had a team.

CUT [0:0.57] - [0:01.04]

Pratt: They had a team up somewhere near Hanoi and we did a resupply mission on a couple of F-4s. I think we talked about that.

Schwan: Yeah.

Pratt: Okay, that was the one DFC that I can remember why I got it. [Laughs].

Schwan: Okay, so then we can take it from literally leaving Vietnam, in that period.

Pratt: Well, left Vietnam...

Schwan: Are we on?

Pratt: I guess.

Schwan: I don't know. 'Cause I really want to use this part of the interview for you to fill in the gaps in the Air Force and what you saw after Vietnam. Then I want to know what you...how you view the Air Force now, I saw a picture...was reading an article about that new bomber they have that looks square.

Pratt: Well, it's got...looks kinda like that. LRSB, B-21 is what they're gonna call it.

Schwan: Okay, and I'd like to know where that fits in. And I would like to know a lot more about the charities.

Pratt: Yeah, we didn't touch at all on the charities.

Schwan: No. And also going back to the Air Force now. Where's it at, and how much of a setback -- and this is not a political discussion -- but how much of a setback do we have reducing the size of our military.

Pratt: Yeah, I know the Air Force numbers, but I don't know all the military, if they're the same.

Schwan: And I know the Army is going to be down to 365, and is no longer capable of fighting two wars.

Pratt: Right.

Schwan: Or even close. [0:03:10] CUT [0:05:20] You get home from Vietnam after three tours.

Pratt: Actually two and a half. Anyway. So, I'm at George Air Force Base, for my third truncated tour -- I was only there for three months -- and basically was a captain/major in the fighter force, and grew up that way, and ended up at MacDill Air Force Base in an F-4 wing -- fighter wing -- where we trained new crews, called an RTU, Replacement Training Unit, I was an instructor pilot there. From there went to Hickam Air Force Base -- which is collocated with Pearl -- for my first staff tour. And I was on the staff at Hickam for three years in a couple different jobs, but mainly in plans, and after that nothing remarkable. The only remarkable thing is that's where I met my wife, Joyce. I'm glad I went to Hawaii because she came there too, we met and got married

Schwan: On the beach, I remember that.

Pratt: So that was the remarkable part of the Hickam tour. So we came back from there and went back to MacDill, where I got a squadron command, and we talked about that the last

time. And for a little over two years had the pleasure and honor of serving as an F-4 squadron commander. I did I guess fairly well, because they promoted me to colonel while I was there, and from there went to Air War College.

Schwan: Okay, now let me interrupt you, which only infantrymen would dare to do. Were you in a state of active ready... [phone rings 0:07:42] in these units, are you always at a wartime capability?

Pratt: Not at those, because I was in training units. The training units theoretically had the capability to gen up and become wartime ready. For instance, when I was at George Air Force Base in a training unit...and we in fact built a squadron and deployed it--that was for my third tour where we went to Thailand, Takhli, Thailand. But it wasn't a matter of taking a unit that existed, and picking it up, we basically had to cobble it together. Because we had four squadrons there, but all the squadrons were training squadrons. We did all the things that a combat unit would do in terms of training, but our job was to train new pilots and new navigators in the airplane. So active wartime readiness, no, only because I was in the training unit, called the Replacement Training Unit, the Navy calls them "Rags", Replacement Air Groups, as opposed to a fighter wing that had a current active wartime commitment. So I never really served...after Vietnam, I didn't serve in a combat ready fighter unit until I became a colonel in Japan, which was after MacDill as a squadron commander, after war college, war college to the Pentagon, a couple years at the Pentagon, then left the Pentagon and went to Misawa, Japan, as the Director of Operations, DO, in the fighter wing there.

Schwan: And that was a unit that could have been activated, if needed.

Pratt: It could have been. That was a unit that we stood up, the Air Force didn't have a fighter unit in northern Japan for many years. They'd had F-4s there back during Vietnam, after the drawdown they pulled them out. Misawa kind of reverted to a Navy base, and the Navy had a P-3 mission, and they kind of owned the base, if you will, from a support standpoint. But the Air Force decided to put a fighter wing back in there, and so when I got there we had no airplanes, my boss at the time -- I was the DO -- which in Air Force parlance...in a wing, the wing commander is the king, the vice wing commander is his deputy or his vice, and then under him there is the operations guy, the logistics guy, the support guy basically. And I was the DO, the Director of Operations, so I'm the ops guy in that chain. And my boss at the time, Colonel Mike Ryan -- since became General Mike Ryan who was chief of staff of the Air Force -- we like to joke that when we got to Misawa, our fleet consisted of two Cessna 150s in the air club and an F-86 on a pedestal, so we built the wing from that, and got the F-16s -- brand new F-16s -- and brought in two squadrons, the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Squadrons. I eventually became the vice commander there, and by the time I left we had two full up combat ready F-16 squadrons.

Schwan: Capable of being deployed?

Pratt: Capable of being deployed? Generally, because we were in the Pacific, our deployment basket, if you will, would generally be in the Pacific region. In other words, they wouldn't take a wing from Misawa and deploy it to Europe, because they had wings in the States that would do that. That make sense?

Schwan: Yes, but is it set up similarly now? Bringing it to the current, where we have these units ready, that can be immediately deployed. And at what strength are they ready? And again, let me translate this as an infantryman and kind of a company commander. Could they immediately be deployed anywhere they wanted them to be deployed?

Pratt: Pretty much. In the basic fighting unit in an Air Force fighter wing is a fighter squadron, so they would deploy generally in units of squadrons...depending on the wing, anywhere from eighteen to twenty-four airplanes. They do, in fact, practice that, they all have what we call a liability commitment, when you say deploy immediately, well, nothing immediate but yes. They practice that...they do that for a living, and they practice all the time, being able, if something happens to pack it up and go. And they do that today, now. I can't...I'm not close enough to it today to give you the combat ready status of all the fighter wings in the Air Force, but I think they're in pretty good shape. And I think they're much better today than they were two years ago when sequestration hit.

Schwan: That was gonna be my next question.

Pratt: Obviously, during sequestration, first couple years, they basically grounded a lot of airplanes. They just didn't have the money to buy the flying time, so the crews spent a lot of time in the simulator, trying to keep their skills up. But they were nowhere near combat ready at that time. I think they've kinda gotten through that, they've still got some issues. I mean, on any given day a squadron could be C1 or C2, C1 being the top level of readiness, C2 I guess if they still do it that way, is the next level, etcetera. Because maybe lack of parts or something to keep them going, but I think the Air Force is in pretty good shape in that way now.

Schwan: So, better than the Army? And better than the Navy?

Pratt: Well, I can't...I don't know.

Schwan: Well, general comments. Well, you're a general, so all of your comments are general.

Pratt: Right, correct.

Schwan: The Navy now is down to less ships than we had at the start of the Second World War.

Pratt: Okay, I'll give you a couple of data points. In the beginning of Desert Storm, the Air Force...active Air Force had a hundred and eighty-eight, hundred-ninety active fighter squadrons. And today they've got less than fifty.

Schwan: So they're cut in half.

Pratt: Oh less than that, in a third. The Air Force had -- active duty, again, at the beginning of Storm -- around five hundred thousand, and now they're at three hundred thousand. Coming down just like the Army is. I think they had three eleven, is the right number. When I was on the staff at Tactical Air Command in the early '90s, we had thirty-six fighter wing equivalents, active fighter wing equivalents -- that is seventy-two airplanes -- in the active force, and we were building to forty. We never got to forty, and I'm guessing now the Air Force probably has, on active duty, probably ten fighter wings

Schwan: From forty.

Pratt: Well, we never got to forty.

Schwan: But they sought forty.

Pratt: Thirty-six, and we had a plan, I used to brief it all the time because I was the plans guy, I'd go around and brief the plan. "This is how we're going to do it, this is the airplanes we're going to buy, what we need to do," and we were going to build to forty wings but it never happened.

Schwan: So, again, as a civilian speaking...me, as a civilian, there's no way we are prepared to defend ourselves on two fronts, much less, it's questionable on one.

Pratt: Oh, I agree with that, I agree with that. There's no way we could fight a two front war right now. I think we could do a pretty good job in one place, depending on the size of the conflict, obviously, and what we need to do, but...my sense is that what the Air Force has is fairly well prepared to do the job, but it's a lot less than it was. Now, those numbers I gave you by the way did not include the Guard Reserves, and the Air Force has a lot of equipment in the Guard Reserves, that would obviously bump that up. And they're in better shape now. When I grew up, we referred to the Air Guard, affectionately, as the raggedy ass militia. You know, they flew and they had a good time and did whatever they did, but they're much more professional now than they were. They're mostly combat ready now, so, as a matter of fact we have a lot of units, not particularly in the fighter units but in the others, that are integrated, mainly the mobility forces...they'll be a wing that's integrated, they have both active aircrew and reserve

aircrew, and active and reserve airplanes in the same wing. And you maybe fly one week with a reserve pilot and an active duty copilot, and a reserve navigator etcetera, because they mix and match them. I think they're doing a good job there. As a matter of fact, I read the other day that the Air Force is coming out with a new wing structure called the integrated wing, where they're going to try that up, truly integrated from the bottom up, with both reserve and the active forces, but that's something new, I haven't seen that yet.

Schwan: So let me try to put it...because obviously the general public, and me, need to understand the status of our Air Force.

Pratt: Right.

Schwan: And how prepared are we, in your opinion, which you can give?

Pratt: My opinion is that, what we have on the ramp...we're in good shape, as opposed to two years ago when we weren't in very good shape because we just weren't getting the flying hours. But I think that we've got, with the forces we have, those forty-eight or so fighter squadrons...we're in pretty good shape, but obviously it's a question of numbers and mass. We've got a third of the mass as we had ten years ago, or whatever. We're so much smaller now, that we've got good capabilities, but capability in terms of two front war, I just don't think it's there.

Schwan: And yet our whole strategy, allegedly now, in the Pentagon, is predicated on that, and it's not possible.

Pratt: That is my opinion.

Schwan: I mean, when I do the numbers for the Army, they don't have a clue, and I don't think that the civilian population understands it at all.

Pratt: What does the Army leadership tell Congress when they go brief them?

Schwan: Not a lot. I get the sense that its very controlled. I get the sense from people that are out that essentially they don't discuss that topic. And in the case of the Army, as you and...I don't...I can't speak for the Air Force, in the case of the Army, it takes ten to one to support an infantryman. So that means thirty-seven thousand infantrymen can be supported.

Pratt: Right, because you have three hundred and seventy-five thousand.

Schwan: Right. So we have no ability to fight in that regard, you know, maybe in the Middle East. The other thing, which leads to other questions, the other thing is even though there's no war right now, as such, as we define it, are we really pounding on the pilots to participate in all these near wars, and have their tours be much more frequent?

Pratt: I don't...because of the limited size, I'll call them the two conflicts we're in now, one in Afghanistan and one conflict in the Mideast ISIS, ISIL, Daesh, whatever you want to call them, whatever. We don't have a huge amount of forces, from an active...you know, airplane on the ground with a pilot in it doing that. So pounding isn't the right word, you know, they rotate them. So I don't think it's anything that causes them to worry about the health of the force in that respect. I do know -- and this is all what I read because I don't get anything anymore -- the crowd in the Air Force that's really being maxed out these days, is the remotely piloted aircraft, we might refer to them as drones, the Air Force prefers to refer to them as RPA, Remotely Piloted Aircraft. But we have so many commitments around the world, everybody's pushing and tugging, and everybody wants more drones, we only got so many, they're building them I guess as fast as they can, and they're training more pilots to be the drone pilots. As a matter of fact, I just read the Air Force is going to open that up, in some respects, to enlisted, which is...in the Air Force they haven't had enlisted pilots since WWII, so that's a huge, huge seat change in the Air Force. But they just...you just can't get enough folks to do it. So those kids, most of them are at Creech Air Force Base -- which is outside of Las Vegas -- is the main place where they fly those drones from. They make themselves coming and going, I mean, I know they're not out in the field living in a tent, but they're working not twenty-four/seven, but fourteen, sixteen hours a day.

Schwan: Stress is stress.

Pratt: The stress is stress, whether you sit in the air conditioning or not.

Schwan: I mean, they're pretty well, in my opinion, from what I hear, they're tearing the Marines up. They're just...

Pratt: Same thing.

Schwan: Too many tours. I know Marines that have had five, six, seven tours. You can't do that.

Pratt: Like the SEAL that got the Medal of Honor, two or three days ago at the White House, he'd had nine combat tours. So you know, two Purple Hearts, nine combat tours, five Bronze Stars of Valor...I mean, on and on and on and on, so. It's tough, it's tough on them now. Like I said, I think the Air Force is in better shape there, than the ground services.

Schwan: Well, that's good to hear, because the ground services...

Pratt: There just aren't very many of them anymore.

Schwan: Yeah, we do not have...coupled with the fact, and this is a dialogue so...is the Air Force, one of the things that we're seeing from a jobs perspective from the Army and the

Marines, is that there's a lot of fifteen-year people, which is captains, majors, somewhat senior NCOs, are being forced out, almost like another rift. They think they're going to save money by not letting them go to twenty, which, in my humble opinion, is preposterous, number one, and number two, we're losing the backbone, it's the captains and the majors that end up fighting.

Pratt: Yeah, the Air Force has the same problem, but it's kind of inverse. I'm talking of the pilot force now, they're having a hard time keeping them in at the ten to fifteen-year point. Because, look at the cohort in the airlines now, there's a huge, huge portion of the airline pilots that, they have to retire at sixty-five, they're building more airplanes and getting more airplanes in the fleet, and they're retiring in...droves is not the right word, but there's a huge tug and pull between the civilian aircraft community, commercial -- and not just the Air Force, but I think the Marines and the Navy are in the same boat -- of being able to keep those kids in, from going out and getting a job with United and Delta or whoever, and getting' out at the ten or twelve year point. They pay, I don't know the numbers, but some pretty good bonuses to keep those kids in now. To extend for...I mean, they extract their pound of flesh, if you stay in, don't quote me on these numbers, I'm making them up, but maybe if you stay in from the ten-year point and you'll guarantee us another eight years, we'll give you twenty thousand a year and half of it up front. Which is a pretty good bonus, but you've got to commit to the eighteen or twenty-year point. So the Air Force has kind of an inverse problem there, because there's just not enough of an influx into the civilian pilot corps. And, obviously if you're running Delta or United, you'd much rather have a combat veteran who's got two thousand hours of flying time.

Schwan: Oh, in an instant.

Pratt: Rather than taking, I mean, nothing wrong with them, but the youngsters that want to fly and they start off in the Piper Cubs, and they go out and get a couple hundred hours in King Airs and Beeches and stuff, and then they go off and get a job flying in the right seat of regional jets. They may have the skill set, but they just don't have the experience. And that's the airline's looking for, the experience. So they'll do a lot of things to get these kids. And now because of the FAA -- and I agree with this, by the way -- it's only been about ten years, they raised the retirement age. It used to be sixty for commercial air pilots, now it's sixty-five. So if you stay in ten, fifteen years, get out at thirty, thirty-five, you've got a thirty-year career ahead of you in the airlines. So, and on the enlisted side...well the Air Force doesn't have a problem meeting their recruitment goals, I think their goals this year are only like twenty-four, twenty-eight thousand. Much smaller force. As a matter of fact, I was at an expo where TLS Veterans, we'll talk about that later, had a booth in Wauconda over the weekend, and their booth was right next to the recruiting booths. There was a Navy recruiter, an Army recruiter, and a Marine recruiter, and I said...I asked the Marine recruiter, I said, "Marine, where's the Air Force guy?" He says, "They're not recruiting, they don't need to be here! They've got all they need."

[Laughs]. As a matter a fact, the Air Force recruiting, they don't even have a -- I live in Crystal Lake, as you know -- they don't even have a recruiter in Crystal Lake. There's a recruiting office there, Army, Navy, Marines there, but the closest Air Force recruiter is down in West Dundee or somewhere. So I think they're in pretty good shape. And I don't think they're forcing people out, and they're recruiting less.

Schwan: What about the size of the reserves? And you're going to be able to edit this as we go, but one statement of yours seems to precipitate another question on my part.

Pratt: I think the reserves are in pretty good shape, because a lot of the...I'll give you an example, a...one of our board members at TLS Veterans, Chris O'Neil, he goes by Tip, Tip O'Neil...Chris was active duty Air Force in the C-141, which is many years ago. Got out, and I'm not sure at which point, stayed in the reserves, went to work for American. So he had a full twenty-year career and retired, I think as a lieutenant colonel, joined the reserves at the twenty-year point, and he's still flying for American. So a lot of them have kinda a dual career there, they'll have a reserve career, flying the reserve airplane, and they've got their civilian career. Same thing with the guard, they'll fly in the guard on the weekends.

Schwan: One of the meetings we've had -- or discussions, not meetings -- I made the statement that, could you still fly? And you said to me, "Absolutely not, it's for the young guys."

Pratt: Well, I don't remember saying that, but what I meant was, if I said that, leaving the physical foibles out, of hearing and sight, etcetera. The ability to fly never leaves you. But when I said the young guys I mean, you can only fly, in my opinion, and be a successful aviator, if you are able to keep the skill set current. The ability to fly an airplane is a very, very fungible - fungible isn't the right word, its perishable -- perishable is the right word. If you don't practice all the time, especially the kinds of airplanes we have now, the new airplanes -- and they all have all the bells and whistles, and the glass cockpits, and all the switches that do all that stuff - if you don't stay up to that, and you don't fly fifteen, twenty hours a month, in my view -- at least in the fighter community -- you can fly the airplane, but you won't be able to effectively deploy in combat because you just don't have the skill set. And beside the skill set of manually...it's just manual dexterity to fly an airplane -- you either got good hands or you don't - but to keep up the situational awareness, and to keep up the skill set to do it correctly, you need to do it a lot. And the youngsters can do that, and, I mean, I could fly tomorrow, but there's no way I could keep that up.

Schwan: No, but based on your experience, you could fight tomorrow is the point that I'm making. And that desire inside you doesn't go away.

Pratt: I could not, tomorrow...well, I could get in an F-16 and remember how to crank it up, and remember how to take it off and fly it, and remember how to land it, not a problem.

But to employ it in combat? No. No. There's just too many things that I wouldn't remember how to do, on the different switches and everything, making things happen in the airplane. As a matter of fact, when I last flew -- when I was last combat ready -- when I was a wing commander on Kunsan as a colonel back in the late '80s I think, in the F-16, there were things that airplane could do that I did not keep up.

Schwan: That was '87, '88.

Pratt: I didn't keep up the skill, necessarily, because there are so many things the airplane could do. My youngsters, they flew every day, they knew how to do it all because they practiced it all. But I didn't fly as much, even though I was combat ready, I knew how to do all the basics, but getting into the real sophisticated stuff that the airplane could do, I couldn't do all of them. But that's okay. I knew what I could do, and they knew what I could do. I could have effectively deployed as a weapons system, I could shoot missiles and drop bombs and shoot the guns.

Schwan: You remain a resource, is the point that I'm making.

Pratt: Exactly, yeah.

Schwan: And that -- a minor aside as an infantry man -- they could put me some place, and I'll fight, but I don't understand the weapons at all. I'd need a...I'm fascinated by the new ones, because I just can't use them.

Pratt: I'm fascinated by the new airplanes and the new fighters, you know I'm...hopefully apparent through this interview since I'm a fighter pilot, I kind of revert to my experience as a fighter pilot, but...the new things that they've got, and the new airplanes like the F-22 and the F-35, which is coming aboard, like the helmet...

Schwan: We'll get to those. Because I want you...I would like you to...you can do what you want.

Pratt: I'm just answering your questions.

Schwan: I would like to have you do the evolution of the aircraft. Which I don't think -- the fighter aircraft -- because I don't think that the average citizen, no matter what we read, has an understanding or appreciation of that evolution.

Pratt: Okay. Where do I start?

Schwan: Start at Vietnam, and the aircraft you flew then.

Pratt: Vietnam, the predominant fighter aircraft was the F-4 Phantom. Which was a great airplane, called it lots of names, double ugly, because it was kind of an ugly thing. Two engines -- originally developed by the Navy in the '50s as a fleet defense interceptor -- and that caused some issues for the F-4, because the Navy built the airplane without an internal cannon, because the Navy didn't think they needed an internal cannon, because the mission of the F-4 at the time off of the carrier was to take off, climb very quickly to altitude, dash out very quickly...that's why it was a Mach two airplane, couldn't do it very long, it would run out of gas, but it could go Mach two and meet the enemy head on, many, many miles away from the carrier, and shoot them down, and then come return to the carrier. Defend the fleet. So it had no internal cannon. But it had a good capability to carry air-to-air missiles, and the capability to carry gravity drop weapons, Mark 82's, napalm, etcetera. Well, the Air Force decided to buy the airplane, so the first airplane was the F-4C, the Navy version was the F-4B. The Air Force only did a couple of things to it different. One, they...the Navy didn't fly with pilots in the rear seat, they flew with RIOs, Radar Intercept Officers. RIO in the F-4, he had a radar scope he looked at. The Air Force decided at the beginning to put two pilots in the airplane...pilots need something to fly with, so the Air Force put a control stick in the back and rudder pedals, which the airplane originally didn't have. But, aside from that, that's the airplane we took to war. Now, the Air Force decided they needed some sort of internal...I'm sorry, needed some sort of twenty millimeter cannon. And they developed a gun pod, which carried an M61A1 twenty millimeter cannon, which had an effective rate of fire...

Schwan: That's the Gatling gun design.

Pratt: Yeah, it was a Gatling gun. Six thousand rounds a minute. And we only carried about a thousand rounds, so we didn't have a lot, but that took up a weapons station, and we had to load it on the center line of the airplane, which took up a weapons station. But that's the airplane we basically took to war in Vietnam, and it was a good airplane. You and I have talked about seeing F-4s do things, we could drop napalm, we could drop all of the gravity weapons, the Mark series, M170, seven-hundred-fifty-pound bomb, with a cannon we could strafe, we had air-to-air missiles, we had other kinds of missiles as well. But, that along with the F-100 and the F-105, were the primary airplanes we had in Vietnam. F-100s were all in-country, Super Sabre -- that's a 1950s vintage airplane -- built by North American. F-86 was in Korea and the F-100 replaced that. It was used generally for in-country close air support. The other airplane, F-105, which had originally been developed by the Air Force for a nuclear strike airplane, to be stationed in Europe, sitting on the ground for a nuclear alert, and when the big balloon went up, to take off with a nuclear weapon in the bomb bay -- it was the only fighter I know that had an internal bomb bay -- and go real low and go real fast, and fly their route in and drop nukes wherever they were told to drop nukes when the balloon went up. But they converted those to...and they were pretty good airplanes to drop conventional weapons. So the three main

fighters were the F-100, the F-4, and the F-105. The F-105s were all in Thailand, F-100s and F-4s in Vietnam, also F-4s in Thailand as well. So those airplanes kind of stayed with the entire Vietnam War, in terms of fighter aircraft. Now the F-105 mainly flew in North Vietnam, I think we had rules back then that airplanes flying out of Thailand, I don't think they could come in-country or not. But it wasn't a very good close air support airplane. It wouldn't fly real slow, but it was a good bomb dropper, it just couldn't get slow and couldn't get down there amongst them like the others could. So it mainly went to North Vietnam. And it paid the price, I'm guessing, and I'm making this up, but I'm thinking probably that at least half the Air Force POWs that came home were F-105 pilots. John Borling, mutual friend, was an F-105 pilot. So, any rate, so back to the F-4. After Vietnam, the F-105 and the F-100 kind of faded. And the F-4 continued to evolve from the C model to the D model, with a new radar but still no internal cannon, to the E model, which was the first F-4 with an internal cannon...the nose was different and longer, and had an internal cannon. Same gun, Gatling gun, but it was internal to the aircraft, so it basically freed up a weapons station on the center line. Because on the F-4, you could...you had basically...you had five stations to hang stuff on. You generally would hang wing tanks -- three hundred and seventy gallon, we called them drop tanks -- on the external outboard stations over the wing, two internal stations where you could carry weapons, carry normally three bombs, and then the center line you could either carry a fuel tank, a gun pod if you needed it, if you weren't an E model, or you could hang a device, a multiple ejector rack, that could carry six bombs on it. I mean, you could put bombs on all five stations, but...

Schwan: Where did they put the napalm?

Pratt: Normally on the two inboard stations. In other words, I'm looking at the wings, had outboard stations, fuel tanks, inboard stations generally were where the bombs, you could carry six...you couldn't carry six cans of napalm because they just couldn't fit, you could carry two on each side, so you could carry four cans of napalm. And then if you had bombs center line, and another ejector rack, you could carry like six bombs on that station. On the two racks on the inboard stations, you usually carry three bombs and two cans of napalm.

Schwan: As a combat pilot, were you aware of how much the infantry loved those napalm pods?

Pratt: Yes. Yes. We could get up close and personal with the napalm, get up close and personal with twenty mike-mike, twenty millimeter, not so much with the five-hundred-pounders.

Schwan: Could you actually see the smoke infantrymen popped?

Pratt: Oh absolutely, we had to.

Schwan: That's always been a mystery to me.

Pratt: When...well, when we would come in to work a close air support mission, our initial contact would be with a Forward Air Controller, who would be airborne. And we didn't have fox mike radio -- FM -- like you did, so he was talking to you guys and we couldn't hear you, because all we had at the time was UHF. So he had a whole bunch of radios, he probably had fox mike, victor, and UHF, so he was talking to the guys on the ground on the fox mike and then he would talk to us on uniform. So he would give us the lay of the land, this is where the good guys are, this is where the bad guys are, see that peak over there, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. And our flight lead would acknowledge that. And generally he would sometimes have you guys on the ground pop smoke to help him, but we generally would drop our weapons based on his mark, based on where you were, and based on where you told him you wanted the weapons in relation to that. He would shoot a Willie Pete, a white phosphorus 2.75-inch rocket, and he would shoot his rocket, it'd hit the ground. "Okay, got my smoke?" "Got your smoke." "Okay, I want you to go fifty meters north, or two hundred meters south," or hopefully hit my smoke if he did it exactly where he wanted it. And we would drop in conjunction with where he told us to drop, in conjunction with his smoke. Does that make sense?

Schwan: Yeah, a lot of times though, we would pop smoke in the back, not the front, because we needed to get you guys as close as we could, and we understood your rules and appreciated them.

Pratt: But the FACs would know where you were, and we had...he had certain rules about how many meters.

Schwan: So we weren't being as tricky as we thought.

Pratt: No.

Schwan: Okay.

Pratt: We could drop -- I'm trying to remember -- I think, napalm fifty to one hundred meters, same thing with twenty mike-mike, from the front of your lines. Now, if there was a huge problem and a prairie fire was called and all that stuff, and you were really in trouble, if they were overrunning, we knew what we were dropping and we knew where you were. Of course, the bombs had to be dropped further, because of the frag pattern, we didn't want to kill you guys, too. Short rounds were not good things. Any rate, back to the evolution of the fighters. The F-4 evolved and became the mainstay fighter for the Air Force, until the development of a couple of new airplanes. The A-10, affectionately known as the Warthog -- still around today -- close air support airplane. Made only for close air support, great big thirty

millimeter cannon in the nose, carried depleted uranium rounds. Originally built, considering that we were going up close and personal and the bad guys had a lot of bullets, they basically called it the titanium bathtub, where the pilot was surrounded by titanium trying to keep the...which frankly is not a very good idea, I don't think, [laughs] you'd rather avoid getting hit by somebody than getting hit and trying to...you know. It's like having a flak jacket on and saying, "Hit me in the chest, it'll be okay," I'd much rather not hit you. So anyway, that airplane's still around and still will be I guess until the 2020s, I won't get into the politics, but there are lots of things as to why that is and why that's not. It's still around. The F-111 was an airplane that was developed, saw some duty in Vietnam, frankly not a real successful, in my opinion, aircraft for that mission. Try to do too many things for too many people. A good nuke strike airplane, again, it had internal weapons, put a nuke in the belly and sweep those wings back and get it going a thousand miles an hour, and again, going into the Europe to drop the nuke mission, which, thank God, we never had to do. So it came and went, called the Aardvark. The next airplanes on the horizon were the F-16, which I flew, and the F-15. Fifteen came first, F-15 Eagle, made by McDonnell Douglas, was built primarily...and still, the F-15 version is an air-to-air airplane, did not have an air-to-ground role associated with it. They eventually built a version of the F-15 called the F-15E -- which is called the Strike Eagle -- which was mechanized, all the F-15E Strike Eagles had two cockpits, pilot and navigator, weapons systems operator. Was mechanized to carry weapons more than the F-15, still an air-to-air role. We still have those, never built a lot of them, only had one wing. Well, had a wing at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and had some in England, still have some in England. The F-15 was an air-to-air only, not the E model, but the A model, air-to-air only. It's still around, still being mechanized, not as much in service as it was. Being replaced as much as it can by the F-22. I'm kind of getting ahead now, but the F-22 was the latest and greatest, the last one was built a few years ago, basically air-to-air aircraft, also has an air-to-ground model. It's...not only is it able to do things other airplanes weren't, such as super cruise. Super cruise means that, without going into afterburner -- afterburner requires lots of gas -- it could stay out of afterburner, in military power, which is all the power you can get before you go into afterburner, and cruise supersonically. No other airplane has done that. But it's also very stealthy. It -- and I don't know the numbers, if I knew them I couldn't tell you -- but it ain't very big on someone's radar scope. It's actually very, very, very stealthy. And it was built to be stealthy.

Schwan: Is that one used by the Air Force, the Navy...

Pratt: Air Force only.

Schwan: Oh, Air Force only.

Pratt: The F-22 has only been used by the Air Force. And the initial buy was supposed to be a lot more, I think they capped it at like one eighty. There was a big political fight, when the civilian side of the DoD said we want to cut them off, and the Air Force -- active duty Air Force -- was pushing for more F-15s, I'm sorry F-22s, and that, I think, in my opinion, is one of the reasons that an Air Force Chief of Staff was relieved, which is, to my knowledge, the first time that that had ever happened, he was relieved by the secretary of defense, and one of the reasons I think was because of his continued support for more F-22s when the DoD said 'we don't want to buy more F-22s.' Any rate, I'm getting ahead of myself, back to the F-16 which was originally built...the original program was called the Lightweight Fighter program. The notion was we'd have a real lightweight fighter, air-to-air fighter, very nimble, very quick, buy a lot of them...crowd the sky with them, go shoot down all the enemy airplanes. Lightweight can do a lot of things. But, well, it's become a lot more of that. It won the competition with the F-17, as a matter of fact I was lucky enough to be stationed at Edwards Air Force Base when that competition happened, and I got to see that up close and personal when it won the competition.

Schwan: Did you get to fly it?

Pratt: I flew it, not at Edwards, but when I got to Kunsan. I had two squadrons. And also at Misawa as the DO and vice, we had two squadrons of F-16s. But it became the mainstay fighter of the Air Force, and they've turned it into a pretty good air-to-ground machine, lots of upgrades over the years, new engines, new avionics, all glass cockpits, true fly-by-wire. In other words, when you move the control stick, all you're doing is moving electrons around, and then they go tell the control surface what to do and the computer really flies the airplane. Lot of technical reasons why that's good, I won't go into them here because I'd probably mess them up, but it basically...it gives you the ability for the computer to control the airplane and be a lot more efficient in terms of being able to have fuel efficiency, etcetera, and be able to pull more Gs, it's the first nine G airplane. Not sure why you'd want to pull nine Gs, I've done it just because we did, but nine Gs is not a combat productive G load. If you're pulling nine Gs because somebody is behind you, you've done something bad wrong a long time ago. But anyway, great airplane, still flying them, still being upgraded, new wings, new engines, new avionics. And it will stay in the fleet until the F-35 -- which was called the Joint Strike Fighter -- competition between Boeing and Lockheed...Lockheed won that. Lots of things in the press being too late to need, late to cost, cost too much. The Air Force has a training wing, operation development wing, and an operational wing being set up...stood up at Hill Air Force Base outside of Salt Lake City. The Marines have some of the airplanes, the Navy has some of theirs. They're three different airplanes, configured differently for carrier ops. For the Navy, sorry, for the Marine ops, short take off and vertical landing, and, of course, the Air Force variant is not made to do either of those. I think it's going to be a good airplane from what I know about it.

Again, it's got a lot of good things in it. It's got a helmet you can put on with all the sensors in the airplane...basically the pilot, looking through his face mask, which is basically a combining glass, he can look around and see everything, and he can look straight down and see the ground underneath his airplane. Obviously, what he's seeing is the sensors under the airplane, are sending signals to the airplane computers to his helmet. Basically, those helmets cost a half million dollars apiece. It's basically like wearing a computer on your head, I'm told. They had a lot of work to do to make them where they were not too heavy...if you pull a lot of Gs and you have a twenty-pound helmet, if you pull five Gs, you have a hundred-pound helmet on all of a sudden. So, any rate, so that's kind of where we are in fighter development. I don't know where the next fighter will come from...

Schwan: Now didn't they stop the F-35?

Pratt: No, still going.

Schwan: That's still going.

Pratt: It's going, they're buying...every time they develop a new airplane, they say they're going to buy this many and they always only buy this many, and the people that build them say the reason they cost so much is we should have built this many, and we got cut off. When you talk that we'll build this many airplanes, and this cost is going to be so many million an airplane, what you're really talking about is the cost of that last airplane off the line. Because you have to roll all your...amortize all your development costs, your R&D, manufacture, and development, etcetera, all of that, so, whatever. So, from a fighter perspective, that's kind of where we are. Question you haven't asked is, will the next fighter have a man in the cockpit. And I can't answer that question.

Schwan: That's kind of a different topic, because I don't necessarily understand the drone. And just personally, I have faith in the pilot.

Pratt: Well the drone...I'm just saying, John, all the remotely piloted aircraft, drones that we have, we do have some that drop weapons, shoot Hellfires. Most of them are reconnaissance drones. But there is...well, a lot of people said when we built the F-32 and the F-35, should it have a pilot? I believe it should, and I think the next one maybe should, right now I'm thinking it should. But I'm telling you, there are people that are talking about it.

Schwan: Again, I don't know anything about planes, and would never be smart enough to fly, but personally, I believe in the integrity of the pilot. And I believe that it's the pilot that, no matter what, is gonna help me. And I don't believe...again, arcane, but I believe that that pilot and his evaluation of my situation is the one that's going to help me.

Pratt: Well, I don't foresee ever having a close air support mission flown by remotely piloted aircraft. As long as we do close air support, and support ground forces, in my opinion, you're going to have a pilot in the cockpit. But I think that there are people that say that there are missions you could fly -- air-to-air missions that you could fly -- with a pilot sitting on the ground at Creech Air Base instead of sitting in the cockpit. Now, whether that's true or not I don't know, but there are people that will argue that is the...fifteen years from now develop the next fighter aircraft. We're getting way off subject, I know, but...

Schwan: That's, in my view, that's the people that think that war can be sterile, and I don't believe that for a second.

Pratt: I'm just telling you, they're out there.

Schwan: I just think it's nonsense.

Pratt: Okay. I've talked about the fighter aircraft on the...you mentioned a while ago, the B-21, which is the LRSB Long Range Strike Bomber, which the award just got made to Northrop Grumman. And the...our bomber fleet today consists of B-52s, which are damn near as old as you are, that's old. B-1s, very few of those, which have been relegated to the conventional role, and the B-2 Spirit -- which they only bought twenty of them -- which is a stealthy bomber, to be used...it can be used both in the conventional and unique roll. It's done some work, but conventionally, not in close air support, and going back as far as I think Kosovo, it was its first use in combat, flying twenty-hour combat missions out of Whiteman Air base. But only twenty of them, the technology is twenty years old, twenty-five years. I don't know much about the Long Range Strike Bomber, because so much of it is classified -- very, very classified -- it's what the Air Force put out for bid, and what they're gonna get. But I've seen...and they've given artists concepts of it, of an airplane that looks kind of like the B-2, a swept wing, kind of a flying wing look, bigger than the B-2, but, a couple of reasons they do that, I think, a lot of it has to do with stealth, and radar cross-section, and that helps them with the problem of trying to make it truly invisible. In my opinion, we have some seriously stealthy airplanes these days, but they aren't completely invisible to the radars of other country's airplanes. Of course, they'll always be invisible to the naked eye, but from the perspective to able to penetrate an enemy's air defense system, they are very stealthy. If I knew them, I couldn't give you the numbers of how many of our F-22s or our B-2s now that we think could penetrate an enemy air defense system, a sophisticated one. But I think the new LRSB B-22 will probably be designed to be much more fuel efficient, fly much further without refueling. I doubt if it will be a supersonic airplane, don't know that, but I think it will be much more stealthy than the ones we have now.

Schwan: Now, do we have the...we have the capability to fly air missions out of the USA, right? So if you were flying, I don't mean Thailand into Vietnam, but can we fly missions out of bases in the USA to the Middle East?

Pratt: We did with the B-2.

Schwan: Okay, so that...

Pratt: They all flew out of Whiteman Air Base, which is in Kansas. They flew from Kansas to the Mideast and back, twenty, twenty-two hour missions. Two guys, or a guy and a gal. As a matter of fact, one of the stories they tell -- and I think this is true -- they have a cockpit, and two folks in the cockpit, pilot and a copilot. And there is no place for anybody to rest, I mean there was space, but it was just a hard floor, like you have here, no carpet obviously. So after the first couple of twenty-two hour missions, they got smart and went down to Walmart or Kmart and bought a couple of these flimsy recliners, the ones with the webbing, the plastic webbing, with the real thin tubing to fold up. And they take those up and fold them out, not during, obviously, the mission.

Schwan: Right.

Pratt: But the droning to and from, one of them would go back and lay down and get a couple hours, get a little rest.

Schwan: Well you need it, twenty-two hours of pressure, that's not a party. So does that mean, and again, understand the perspective of someone who is an infantryman a long time ago, does that mean that we will close the airbases over time in Japan and South Korea?

Pratt: I don't think so. We're talking about the bomber mission now. If you start talking about forward deploying, or having Air Force forces that support troops on the ground, we're gonna deploy. We'll be in Japan or Korea, or we'll be in some bases in the Mideast, or bases in Europe, we still have 'em there, and we can get into other bases depending on the different agreements we have with the different countries. We've had some quote 'demonstrations' lately, of taking airplanes into Poland, and those were Polish airbases where they did that not ours, just kind of a show of force. We have a lot less airplanes forward deployed now, we'd have to do that...talking numbers, during the Cold War we had ten fighter wings, probably the equivalent of three fighter squadrons per wing, in Europe, and now I think we're down to nine or ten fighter squadrons that are permanently stationed there. But we've got...truly have the ability to deploy from the States, it's only an eight-hour flight. And that's back to the mobility issue, if we want to deploy them, you get up, you mobilize the wing, the cargo airplanes come in, it's all orchestrated, all the mobility equipment has been marshalled, it's on pallets, goes into

the C-17s, the C-5s, it's really a fine tuned, orchestrated dance, kabuki dance, they do to get to the...

Schwan: Do they maintain the same war footing intensity when they're in a base in the USA flying combat missions over the Middle East?

Pratt: No, they don't...well, war footing, yes. But if they're in a training arm, no. Just like the Army units, wherever they are, they train to be able to go to war, same thing. They fly the combat units in the stations in the US, they fly simulated combat...that's what they do for a living, they fly simulated combat missions every time they fly. So, a war footing perspective, yes. But they don't take off from Europe and the states and go to Mideast and drop bombs and come back, they forward deploy to do that.

[1:06:55] CUT [1:07:17]

Schwan: You had...what would you say -- and I hate nebulous questions -- what would you say was your greatest contribution to the Air Force and our country, in retrospect, now?

Pratt: That's a tough question. I don't know the answer to that, John. I think that I developed, over the years, the ability to...bond with is not the right word, but to understand the people under me, whether it be at the squadron level, or the wing level, or the numbered Air Force level, or the major command level, and to be able to go out and truly lead those people and work with them, and have them understand me, and have me, more importantly, understand them. And, for lack of a better word, to motivate them to do their job better. I think I was able to do it, like I said, at all levels, from squadron, when I...and we talked about this, [1:08:57] CUT [1:09:04] we talked about, that's the last time, when I talked about having as a squadron the last F-4 squadron on essentially an F-16 base, and to motivate my youngsters to continue to be proud of the fact that they were flying the F-4, and do a good job doing that. To the wing level, and again at the major command level, or the numbered Air Force level, where I owned nineteen different wings, I'm sorry, I was Nineteenth Air Force on eleven different wings, and to go out and visit all the wings and talk to the people and I was a...as a two-star general, I was an instructor pilot in the T-38 aircraft, I think the only one that ever did that, and I would go out to our wings that had the T-38 and fly missions with second lieutenants, I would be their instructor in the backseat of the T-38. To be able to instruct them, to be able to go up close and personal with my people and be able to motivate 'em, and let them know that I was one of them, I wasn't this big ogre...I mean, I remember when I was a lieutenant and the DO in the wing was Jesus Christ and the wing commander himself was God, and it was always like that, and I always tried to break that barrier and let people know that, hey, I put my pants on one leg at a time just like you do in the morning. Help motivate them and help bring them forward...I told this story, I think, earlier, about when we didn't do well in an inspection in

Kunsan when I was a wing commander, and I stood on a flatbed, and 'cause I meant it, to tell the people that the flight command not doing well was my fault, and I needed their help in succeeding the next time, which we did. And that's the sort of thing that I think, I look back on it, and think I did a pretty good job at that. I mean, I wasn't the best, I wasn't the greatest. I look at some of the speeches that our current Air Force chief of staff gives, a wonderful, wonderful communicator and motivator for our youngsters. Much better than I ever could. I think that's a long answer to a short question.

Schwan: No, you're doing an amazing job, if I may be so bold, as to communicate your feelings and your love for the Air Force.

Pratt: Well thank you.

Schwan: And for the men and women that served under you, and that's exactly what I wanted to get out of the interview, because I always had that sense of that's how you feel. Now, on a completely different topic, you worked as a civilian when you got out?

Pratt: Yes.

Schwan: And who did you work for?

Pratt: I retired in '97, and for five years, six years, I consulted in the defense industry, obviously, because it's what I knew. I consulted for all the big boys, Boeing, Lockheed, Northrop, and one of my consulting clients, well I guess it was Northrop, I consulted for their plant in Rolling Meadows, which is probably twenty-five miles from where we sit. Big facility, they do now probably about a billion dollars a year in revenue. I consulted for them for five years, as I said, and they offered me a full time job as a vice president, and so that's why I'm sitting here today, that's why I moved to Chicago, to Chicagoland. So we moved up here in 2002 and I worked for Northrop as a vice president, both in the radio frequency electronic warfare business unit, and later, I spent about half my time each with that, and as the vice president for strategy development in marketing. And then Northrop's got a rule, for the officers of their company, that sixty-five is the cutoff, you turn sixty-five and you're forced to retire. Probably not a bad rule, a company like Northrop's got like, three hundred officers, if you never make the officers retire, nobody can move up, so it's probably good to kinda keep the ladder going upwards for youngsters.

Schwan: Do they still try to consult with you because of all the experience you had, or is it really a cut off?

Pratt: Well, it's a cutoff, there's a ninety-day window for the revolving door thing, but I consulted for them for another couple of years, along with some other companies, and I

basically...that was in 2008, I actively consulted...probably 2011- 12, three or four years ago, and I haven't really done a lot of active consulting since then, I'm off on some other things that you know about and I'm sure you want to talk about.

Schwan: I want to talk about those other things, and then I want to come back to -- which I know is difficult -- but I want to come back to you giving the state of the state of the Air Force, in your opinion, and you giving...you communicate great feelings, General, and I don't mind saying that, and you communicate that it was to you a service and a pleasure, and pleasure is a crap word, but you understand what I'm saying, and I want to get back to that and a summation, in your words of your career, but not yet.

Pratt: Okay, good, 'cause I'm not sure I can answer that.

Schwan: That's the whole point, your subsequent charitable activities...would you go into some explanation of that, some detail on that, and I would say kind of use this broadcast of this tape of what the key things are that you're doing, and who you're trying to help.

Pratt: Well, since I've retired, and since I've retired again, one of my passions has been veterans. You and I both grew up in the Vietnam era, when veterans that came home weren't treated very well, things are different now. I think that we do a good job of...of the public looking out and saying we love our veterans, we love our military, and I think the country has done a much better job in that. But we've still got, in my opinion, a lot of need for veterans...a lot of the youngsters come back, they have educational debt, we've finally discovered what PTSD really is, that people do get that and it's a true mental issue, and its true issues we need to work, and a lot of the youngsters coming back and also from the Vietnam era, veterans are still grappling with both mental and physical issues, and also the issues of just basically coming back in and becoming productive members of society, so that always kind of worried me, and I was fortunate, several years ago to be introduced to two wonderful young men, who you know well, Eli Williamson and Roy Sartin, who are graduates of Luther College in Iowa, both served in the reserves, came back from their reserve tours in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and found themselves looking for work, which they were able to get not a problem, but both saddled with huge educational debts, that weren't being covered by the VA, so they, together, along with another fine gentleman you know named Maynard Anderson, who's also a graduate of Luther. They decided to form a charitable 501C3, named "Leave no Veteran Behind" which was initially designed to find veterans with educational debt, raise money to retire that debt, fifteen, twenty, thirty thousand dollars, and in return they would give community service. And they would help these veterans find, not real high paying jobs, but jobs and try to work them back into the community. I heard about that through an associate of mine who knew Maynard, and Maynard's a chairman of the board, he contacted me and asked me what I thought about joining him on the board, came down, had a lunch with Roy and Eli, called him up that

afternoon and said, "Sign me up". So I've been associated, first briefly on the board of advisors, and then on the board of directors, with Leave No Veteran Behind, pretty much from their inception. They've stepped out and they've expanded their portfolio, if you will, from only doing student debt, a lot of workforce placement now, not only educationally, finding people jobs, helping them find jobs, do some wonderful work with the Chicago Public Schools, in a program called "safe passage", where they find veterans, bring them in, train them, and these veterans go into some of the, rougher districts, if you will, of Chicago, and basically help kids get back and forth to school, to keep them from getting hurt, getting back to school. They have youth corps programs that they run in the summertime, and they use these veterans to help train the youths. It's a wonderful charity, we've expanded, it was fairly small when we started, I'm not sure what our current budget is now, but it's a wonderful program, still run by Eli and Roy, Maynard is still the chairman of the board, John is also on the board for that. So that is a wonderful charity based in Chicago. And now that we've kind of...in the process of growing up over the past few years, we're looking into expanding into other places like Detroit, but that's more to come. Wonderful charity. Another veteran's charity I became associated with about, probably two and a half years ago, is, the official name is "Transitional Living Services, Inc." which doesn't really mean much, or TLS Veterans which doesn't mean much. But what TLS Veterans is, is an organization that was founded about twenty years ago, by a fine gentleman by the name of Alan Belcher, combat veteran with the Army, came back, he's a psychologist. He founded a veteran's organization in McHenry County in 2001, bought and rehabbed an old motel up in Hebron, Illinois, almost to the border of Wisconsin, up in northwest McHenry County, renamed it "New Horizons," and it has twenty rooms in it, and it houses twenty homeless vets. It's full all the time, has a waiting list. What New Horizons does, is we bring homeless veterans in, normally referred, generally from the VA in North Chicago, we've got a relationship with them, bring them in off the street, give them a place to live, put food in their mouth, a roof over their head, get them the counseling and therapy they need, and most of them frankly have problems, both mental problems and substance abuse problems. Get 'em on their feet, find them a job, get them working, get 'em established, moved them out of New Horizons, find them a permanent place they can live that they can afford based on the work they have, and provide them aftercare, because we don't want to see them back at New Horizons again. We've been doing that for about twenty years, very, very successful program. Some of the veterans will stay there six months, some will stay there a year and a half, but we've got a staff there to take care of them. The TLS Veterans has expanded beyond Alan Belcher's initial vision of helping homeless vets. We now do a food pantry, have a food pantry, any vet can walk in. "I need some this, that, the other thing." We have a food pantry once a month where the Northern Illinois Food Bank comes out to our facility in McHenry, we do it the third Thursday of the month. Two weeks ago I was there and we serviced, I think, about a hundred and twenty-five veteran's families. All you got to do is be able to prove you're a

veteran, with either a VA card or a DD214 or a retired military card, and we don't ask how much money you make, but you get in line and you walk away with a basket full of food until the next month. We do counseling, we do therapy, we do educational referral, we have a full time educational referrer, he brings in...we work on resumes, we go out into the community and find these people work. We're pretty much a grant oriented business now, we have grants both from the VA and from the Department of Labor, to the homeless veteran's reintegration programs, supportive services for veteran's families, and VA grant per diem program. Work very closely with Lovell, the VA hospital in North Chicago, also with Jessie Brown in Hines, we keep people at those facilities, pretty much two or three days a week. But again, its growing, we're trying to expand, we're about a million-and-a-half a year now, program. But grants come and go, and government money comes and goes, so we're trying to expand our donation base for that. So those are the two main veteran's organizations that I'm involved with, I'm on the board for Leave No Veteran Behind and currently the president of the board of directors for TLS Veterans.

Schwan: What is your -- and we'll go back to them -- what is your view of the VA right now?

Pratt: I think that that is site specific. I mean, I think the VA still has problems...I mean, you can read about it in the paper, still have the big problem in Phoenix, and they have problems in other ways, and they still take forever to process claims, they're inundated, and they keep throwing money at it, I'm not sure if they're fixed at the top level or not. I do have respect for the one I'm closest to, and that's the VA hospital in North Chicago. Retired Air Force Colonel, I believe it's Steve Holt took over a couple years ago, doing a great job, and we have a great relationship with TLS Veterans. We keep people there all the time, and they keep people at our New Horizons facility, probably two or three days a week, to monitor the VA grant per diem program, because they pay for so many dollars per bed night for our residents in New Horizons. Every time we have a resident in a bed overnight, we get like forty, forty-five bucks from the VA, we obviously have to file for that. They also have what they call a domiciliary, it's a unit that houses sixty-six homeless veterans at the VA hospital at Lovell, but it's very short term, it's a dormitory. They bring them in and bring them off the streets, they find homeless vets and put them up until, either they can refer them to someone like us, or get them the right counselling, the right therapy, and maybe get them back on the street as a productive member of society. The problem with a lot of the veterans -- a lot of the homeless veterans -- that I've found, is that they kind of lose hope, in my view. We've got a formerly homeless veteran who is on the board of directors of TLS Veterans, frankly I'm glad we have her, frankly we didn't have her before. The reason we do is because the VA grant per diem program said, "Hey, you need to have a formerly homeless vet," and I'm glad they told us that 'cause I'm glad we have her, because she brings great insight into the...I've never been homeless, neither of us have ever

been homeless, this lady was homeless for four years, lived on Lower Wacker Avenue, but she says one of the things she learned when she was a resident at New Horizons was the ability to experience hope again, she was hopeless, and the ability to learn and to say, "There's a life for me after being homeless, I can get out, I don't have to be scared anymore. I can learn. I can be sober." She's been sober for ten years...be clean and sober. I can get a job. I can get my daughter back. I can find a house. I can achieve success and become a productive member of society. As a matter of fact, the mission of TLS Veterans is to help these needy veterans and their families, give them the tools needed to achieve...experience hope and achieve success [1:28:06] CUT [1:28:40]

Schwan: Do you find a lot of veterans or veteran's organizations reaching out to you, or do you have to proselytize as you go?

Pratt: Yes, to both, we have a good relationship -- I'm talking TLS Veterans now -- we have a fairly good relationship with the VFWs, the American Legions, the different DAV chapters. As a matter of fact, next Saturday night the VFW in McHenry is having a St. Paddy's Day party with raffles, giving away trips to the Caribbean and golf for a year at the Chalet Hills Golf Course, and its twenty bucks to get in the door, and there's food, and you buy your drink ticket, and TLS Veterans is going to be the beneficiary for everything they make that night, we get. So, from that respect...that's just one example. The Northern Illinois Food Bank I mentioned, we get once a month, that costs a thousand bucks a month, and the VFWs and the American Legions in the area pay that, so we get money from them to pay that. We could do better, and frankly with TLS Veterans, we weren't very well known in the community that we live in, Crystal Lake, McHenry County, you could walk down the street in Crystal Lake today and ask a hundred people what TLS Veterans is, and maybe two of them will have heard of it. One of the things I'm trying to do is, while I remain the president, along with our executive director who we hired about a year ago, is to basically become known in the community, and let people know who TLS Veterans are. Because a lot of people are very generous with their charitable money, but I know it's all a zero sum game, you only have so much you can give, and there are a lot of great charities out there. And a lot of people in the area I live in give a lot of money to a lot of charities, but I want to give them the opportunity to know TLS Veterans and then make that decision, whether they take that dollar and give it to the Raue Center for the Arts, where we've been, or to TLS Veterans, or the YMCA or CASA, or many of the...who, by the way, I'm involved with all those. So, any rate, we're trying to become involved in the community. You didn't ask that question, but I thought I'd throw in a plug.

Schwan: No, that was its point. Do you have much interface with your old friends from the Air Force?

Pratt: You know, not really. I keep up...I really got two very, very close friends who remain...if I had to say I had two best friends in the world, they would be them. One is a retired chief of staff, four-star, and the other retired a three-star. He and I flew his bachelor's combat together in Vietnam and lived together as bachelors when we were at George Air Force Base. I keep in touch with them, a couple more friends, but I don't really...I don't really keep in touch. I did more when I was working either as a consultant or with Northrop Grumman, because obviously, the Air Force, at Northrop Grumman, would be one of the customers, and the Air Force was one of the customers I consulted for with, and so I stayed in touch through a lot of Air Force Association events, the big trade shows. I would go to all of those, hell I'd know half the people in the room, [laughs] I don't know if you ever go to the ASA or...but those things, the huge trade shows, if you're a retired flag or general, you'll meet every retired flag or general that you ever knew. But since then, I don't really keep up that much.

Schwan: No, infantrymen don't do that, usually.

Pratt: But you guys keep up.

Schwan: Oh, totally, the First Cav, and the Armed Forces Council, etcetera.

Pratt: Well, I keep up, but the problem with...like, in combat, we rotated, and you guys were on a rotational basis, and we didn't generally supply or rotate or deploy a unit together that would stay together for a year. Used to be that the people would rotate through, you could be in a fighter squadron in Da Nang for a year, and the turnover could be four x, so you never made a years' worth of combat friends, does that make sense?

Schwan: Yes.

Pratt: So, the only reunion I've been to was my pilot training class, class 66C, Laredo Air Force Base, Texas, which doesn't exist anymore. So we got together, there were twenty-seven of us that graduated out of a total of...we started with thirty-eight, but a bunch of guys washed through, so probably fifty or something started, graduated twenty-five, twenty-seven. And I lost track with most of them, a lot of guys went on to airlines, but four or five years ago I got a phone call from an old pilot training classmate I hadn't heard from in forty years. And I was like, the third one of us that he had tracked down, so we got on the internet over the telephone and started burning the airwaves and the electrons, and we found all but one. Either dead, or we knew the ones that were dead, and one guy we never found, we didn't know if he was dead or alive. [Laughs]. But I thought that was remarkable, that we could track all those guys down after almost fifty years. So we had two reunions, one at like, the forty-six, forty-seven-year point when we first got together, and then we had our fiftieth anniversary reunion of our pilot training down in Las Vegas a few years ago. So that's the only reunion I've been to.

Schwan: Now, I want to go back to the bigger question of...

[1:35:06] CUT [1:35:20]

Schwan: So you know my question.

Pratt: Why don't you ask it again, for the record.

Schwan: Okay, my question is really how do you define your legacy, which is half of it, and the other half of it is, where do you see the Air Force going as an institution, for want of a better term?

Pratt: Legacy. We kinda talked about that a few minutes ago, about what kinda I thought I left there. I guess...

Schwan: Yeah, but you're still involved, you're still doing things. That's why I go back to it after.

Pratt: My legacy in the Air Force, what did I leave behind. Well, what I hope I left behind, is that I was a good fighter pilot who grew up in the Air Force with a lot of...hell of a lot of good fighter pilots, many I knew. We grew up together, and I was lucky enough to continue to succeed in the Air Force, and continue to raise up in the Air Force, and was able to keep that connection, I'm kind of saying what I said before, but to keep that connection with the people and let my people know, whether they were fighter pilots, or maintenance guys, and even when, up to when I became a three-star, that they had a person that they could look up to, that they could come to for advice, and someone who never...who never was not one of them, and was able to understand them and understand their needs, and their desires, and their wants, and what they needed. The same thing we do with the veterans, to be able to understand them, to be able to help them do what they do. I think I was reachable, if that makes sense, all the way to the end. And you can look back, and you can talk to people how knew me in the Air Force, and they will say -- and I don't know if this is good or bad -- "Pratt was a good fighter pilot, and he continued to be one, but how in the hell did he get to be a three-star? Because he was always one of us, and is still one of us." Now one thing, though, that I need to add this, that I didn't forget, and one thing that, when I was a commander and I had the opportunity to interview youngsters either for squadron command, or wing command, or whatever command it was, one of the things I always left with them -- and frankly an interview at that level wasn't an interview, they'd already passed all the interviews -- it was me telling them my philosophy. "One thing that you need to remember as you grow and become part of leadership, is that now you are now part of the leadership, and you're not one of the boys anymore." If you see folks that become squadron commanders in the Air Force, for instance, that failed, why did they fail? They all had all the right tickets, knew all the right people, did all the right things, had a great

record, they passed all sorts of boards, they were completely qualified to be a squadron commander. And I can look back and tell you the ones that succeeded and the ones that failed, and almost to a man, or a woman, the ones that failed were the ones that could never break that connection between being one of the boys, and being a leader. In other words, being able to come back after a meeting when a decision was made about some combat tactic we're going to use in training, and it wasn't one of the ones you wanted goin' in, and coming back to the squadron and saying "Okay guys, here's the decision, and here's what we're going to do, and this is why we're gonna do it," instead of coming back and saying, "Well, I went into that damn meeting with those colonels, and they shot us down, we can't do it like we want to do it, we gotta to do it like they want to do it, so, let's just do the best we can." Do you understand the difference? So you've got to make that jump to being part of the leadership from being one of the boys. At the same time, going back to what I said before I started that, you've got to be reachable and touchable, and your people need to know that you're there, and you're there for them, if they need you they can reach you all the way up, and you'll always be someone who looks out for them and touches them, and knows what they need, and know what you can do to support them as they continue to grow in the Air Force.

Schwan: Are there any things now that we did not cover that you would have wished to, realizing there are better questioners than myself or interviewers...

Pratt: Well, I'm running out of words now, I'm running out of brain bytes.

Schwan: Understand, understand.

Pratt: I'm trying to think...No...

Schwan: Kind of...and I don't expect any self-deprecating comments, because I think those things are absurd, but you obviously have lived an amazing life, an amazing career, and you are what you appear. Which I feel I am rather good at defining, or recognizing, and it's obvious that it gave you pleasure, or satisfaction, pleasure's a bad word...

Pratt: Well I was, I absolutely was, I was probably pleased, but I was glad I was able to do what I could do in the Air Force. I was very, very happy when they kept promoting me, but I was never one to say...the day I entered the Air Force, me, the fact that I might one day be a general officer, I would have been stunned. I never even wanted...I was never one of these that came up like, "Well, by God, I'm a second lieutenant and my goal is to make first lieutenant, my goal is to make captain, or my goal is if I do all these right things, fill all these squares, I'll make a colonel and if I make a good colonel I'll be a general." No way in hell I did all of that. And you and I know them, you've seen 'em. And they aren't very nice people, and people see them for what they are, and they basically blow them off. And some of them make it to the top, unfortunately they do. Not as many as, thankfully, that want to, but you know, I...frankly, I was

better at being lucky than good. I was lucky in that, I think I was pretty good at what I did, I think I was a pretty good fighter pilot. I joke with my friend Mike Ryan about who the best fighter pilot in the world is, and my other unintelligible [1:43:00], but I was a good fighter pilot and I did a good job at it. You know, I was lucky, because, you know, timing is everything, John, you've got to be at the right place and you have got to be at the right time, and I can tell you friends of mine that made colonel, that absolutely would have been excellent general officers, and should have been general officers, but just because of circumstances, because of where they were, and because of things beyond their control, their boss's control, there are only so many slots when you get to that level. Once you get passed over a couple of times at that level, you're just...so, at any rate, I was lucky enough to be at the right places at the right time, through no fault of mine, I didn't try to be there, I was just there. And I did good work, I'll put it this way, I must have done good work. Those I worked for were obviously pleased with the work I did, and they rewarded me for it. But, did I ever go looking for it? Nope. Obviously, at the end of the day, am I glad, am I happy that I'm a retired three-star? Absolutely.

Schwan: Well General, I want to thank you for your time, on behalf of the Pritzker...I appreciate it.

Pratt: Thank you, John.

Schwan: And look forward to working with you together in many different areas, because our paths do cross.

Pratt: Yes, they continue to cross and I'm sure they will. Thank you, John.

Schwan: Thank you.

END [1:44:45]