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Interviewee: Harold G. Davis

Interviewer: Jacob Hofeldt

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Jacob Hofeldt: So, what years did you serve?

Harold Davis: 1954, January 8. Went to Lackland Air Force Base for basic training for, I think it was either 12 or 16 weeks. I can't remember now. Anyway, we had applied for pilot training too, and just barely got started in pilot training and they washed us all out because the Korean War—they were in the peace settlements and they didn't need any more pilots or navigators or anything. I didn't qualify for a navigator anyway. Disqualified me. I think they told me it was for distant vision or something like that, after we'd been in cadet school for a week, I think it was. So anyway, then I got assigned to radar—electronics, radar and radio school in Biloxi, Mississippi, for 12 months. Eleven months or twelve months, something like that. Went to school in Biloxi, Mississippi, for that duration of time. Got out of school in late December, went home on leave for 30 days, and then they shipped me to Japan. I was in Japan for two years, I guess. Well, almost two years. I didn't quite serve two years because my father was killed in an accident, and I got called back for—I only had two more months left, I think—my tour duty in the Far East, so I got called back to the States, and they reassigned me to Great Falls, Montana, because it was close to home. My mother had four young kids, and she needed some help at home, so I got assigned to Great Falls for the rest of my tour of duty.

JH: What rank did you achieve?

HD: Airman 3rd Class. Actually, I was accepted for Staff Sergeant, but they had an early out process, and I took the early out rather than take the Staff Sergeant rank. Staff Sergeant was more or less if I re-upped.

JH: What was your training experience like?

HD: It was awakening for a young kid from Montana that didn't have much discipline. [laughs] It was good experience, actually. It helped me a lot. Helped my anger situation quite a bit. Yeah. It was kind of tough I thought at the time, but actually, it wasn't really all that tough. I think that the week that I spent in air cadet was even rougher—[unintelligible] and eight square meals and all that kind of stuff. I enjoyed my stay in the Far East. I had a lot of fun. We did a lot of traveling and seen a lot of the country in the Far East and the South Pacific. Places like Okinawa, Hong Kong, Quemoy [Jinmen], Philippine Islands, Australia, Wake Island. Spent a little time in most of them places, what they called it the TDY [Temporary Duty Travel] situations where we just went on training missions for maybe a week to 10 days, or maybe two weeks sometimes.

We spent more time in Clark Field [Clark Air Base] than any one of them that was in the Philippine Islands. The reason for that was mainly because we went to Baguio, which was a resort area in the mountainous area of the Philippine Islands. While we were there, they had a typhoon come through the island, and it destroyed all the roads. So, we were stranded in this resort area for a week—complete week. They even flew some money into us so we could still have a good time, and a helicopter. [laughs] I spent a lot of time going to school in the electronic part because they were forever changing communication systems, bombing systems, location systems. You know, just like they do today—the electronics—they were upgrading it every six months. We had to go back to school for something. I get a little tired of that, outside of it. Outside of that, military service, it was great. I never got shot at myself.

There was a little guerrilla warfare in Korea. I was doing guard duty on the base and a little shooting went on, but they weren't shooting at me, they were just shooting. I was coming back from Korea TDY. We used to go to Korea every—The wing used to have three squadrons in it, and one squadron had to be in Korea all the time, the first year I was there. So, I did two rotations in Korea, two weeks at a time. One time on the way back, I was riding in one of the B-26s and pilot decided he was going to buzz a junk. He didn't know the junk was armed [laughs]; we didn't have any armory. So, they shot at—they fired a few rounds at us, but he dumped his cargo on them out of the bomb bay. We had a piece of plywood in the bomb bay we had strapped a lot of tools and what have you. He got reprimanded for it, big time.

No, I got to Japan just about the time, more or less, they signed the peace treaty, so we didn't have any combat experience at all, other than just guard—the two weeks we had to spend in Korea every, maybe, I think it was about every three or four months. The squadrons, there was three squadrons in this wing. One squadron had to be in Japan, I mean in Korea, all the time. I was in the 13th? Yeah, the 13th bomb squadron. It was the 13th, the 8th, and the 27th. Each squadron consisted of about 22 airplanes, usually one of them was equipped with night fighter situation, which didn't have any internal bombs. We had a hard nose, and it was six, .50 caliber machine guns, I believe it was, and a nose and four on each wing. I'll take that back, it had four .50 caliber machine guns and a nose, and four on each wing, and a .37 millimeter cannon in the front of it too—single shot cannon that the flight engineer loaded all the time. The rest of them were all bombers. They had the glass noses on them with an APQ-13 bombsight in them.

They changed that in the middle of the situation. The B-26s got outdated in about 1956—'55 I think, maybe '55. We went to B-57s, which was a high-altitude bomber—large-wing bomber—designed after the Canberra, the English Canberra twin-engine jet. We had a little bigger engines in the B-57s than they had in the Canberra. It would fly at 55,000 feet with one Mark 6 atomic bomb and a rotating bomb door. I did actually load one, or participated in loading one, during the Quemoy incident [Second Taiwan Strait Crisis]. Chinese were getting ready to invade Quemoy, and the United States stepped in and threatened atomic retaliation and all that whatever. Anyway, nothing happened. I don't know what they did, but the bomb came back to Japan, I think. But I didn't participate in unloading it or anything, so I don't know what happened to it. They didn't drop it, obviously.

Kind of scared my family when I had to have top-secret clearance to participate in loading this bomb. So, they had the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] investigate my school records, my childhood, and everything else in the little town of Cut Bank, so they became a little bit concerned with my family and what have you. So, I got a lot of letters and questions and what have you, which I couldn't even bother to answer. It was kind of funny, but nothing ever came of it. Outside of that, the state side was quite a bit different than tactical. I was in Tactical Air Command [TAC] to begin with, and then they were a lot more efficient than the SAC [Strategic Air Command] air command that I was in afterwards, that I spent my last year in. Tactical Air Command was probably most efficient operation that I had seen in the service while I was there. It was a lot of fun.

Anything else?

JH: Yeah. What was the experience communicating between the different ranks?

HD: Between what?

JH: The different ranks.

HD: Different ranks? I never had any problem except for, probably a couple of them. I had one that was kind of prejudiced and a superior officer that I was under, it was a captain. For some reason or another, I don't know what it was, he seemed to single me out for a few things. Looking back on it, I think maybe it was the sergeant that I was under on the flight line that maybe was the instigator of it too, but outside of that, I didn't have any problems. I was just a regular repairman when I was in the Tactical Air Command. I was on flying status. I don't know why we was on flying status because all the stuff that we had to fix was in the back of the airplane, and we couldn't even get access to it unless the airplane was on the ground. The units that were inside, we could change them and what have you, but we didn't really delve into the units. Like, the APQ-13 consisted of seven or nine boxes—pretty good size boxes, modulators, amplifiers, and what have you. We just changed a whole box if we figured out that the modulator was bad or the amplifier was bad or something—we just changed the whole unit, put a working one in it was the way we fixed everything. It's kind of like putting an alternator or starter on a car—the same thing.

We got flying status pay, which amounted at that time to somewhere around \$40 to \$60 a month. I think, maybe, it was even \$100 a month when I got to SAC. Wasn't any problem getting flights in the B-26 on their training missions because they didn't need a bombardier on most of them. So, you'd get to ride in the bombardier's seat for, I think it was, two to four hours every month you had to fly to collect the money. But when you got into SAC, it was the same time, but it was a refueling wing, KB-50s, and they did most of the refueling in the Gulf of Alaska. So, that was a long flight. We'd leave Great Falls probably at 4:00 in the afternoon in the wintertime, fly to the Prince William Sound or somewhere up there, and make a refueling

connection with some fighters or some B-47s, bombers, refuel and then fly back. It was an 8-and-a-half hour flight. Yes. It was a long flight, and them airplanes weren't heated. And it's cold up there at 30,000 feet. It's colder than hell. So, we'd have to steal one of them heated suits that you put on. They made, it's kind of a sheep-skin, lined suit that they wore. You plugged it into the electrical system, and it heated it. It worked pretty good. But if you didn't have one of them, it was a pretty miserable trip. Yeah. So, I only took two or three of those trips. It wasn't worth the money that you was getting for it. [laughs]

Outside of that, I just worked in the maintenance department. I was a flight line coordinator in Great Falls, which consisted of when the planes came in from their mission, I'd go to the flight office and the operations office. The pilots would always, or the engineers or whatever, would write up a sheet on what was all the discrepancies with the electronics. I would take those back to the squadron and assign people to go fix them or take care of them or what have you. Yeah, I enjoyed that part of it. That was probably the highest, the most authority I ever had in the service was a flight line coordinator for electronics.

It was even time—these tech reps from RCA and Raytheon were trying to recruit me to take a tech rep job. Go to school in California for a year for them and take a tech rep job, which you just travel around the country with new equipment and what have you and introduce it—explain it. But I was kind of tired by the service by that time, and I decided not to do it. Besides that, I was getting married at the time, and I knew that wasn't going to be very good for family life. So, I got out in 1957, and I think it was three months short of serving four years, but I had to serve six years in the Air Force Reserve, which we had a meeting every—out here at the Fort Missoula, we had a meeting, supposedly it was a training meeting every month or every three weeks. I can't remember now exactly. We did get paid for that though too, and I can't remember how much. It was very little. It was a little bit, but we got paid for it. Yeah.

I got my service completed with actually 10 years of service, just about 10 years of service. Four of it active duty and six of it inactive, but I got the G.I. bill out of it. Went to school. The G.I. bill amounted to, I think it was right around \$275 or \$300 a month. Pretty skinny. You had to have a job to go along with it. Couple jobs in my case.

Anything else?

JH: Yeah. What was the life like on the bases?

HD: It was good, actually. You had all the amenities that you needed. We had the Airmen's Club, the Noncommissioned Officers' Club, and an officer's club. You had entertainment there. You could usually go off base without any problem, even in Japan and Korea. The only place we had problem going off base was originally in Korea because there was still some guerilla activity going on around, and you couldn't go alone or something. You had to be in a party of—I can't remember. They had what they called camera tourists that they'd take you out and you'd roam around and what have you, visit. Koreans didn't have any facilities like they did in Japan—bars

for the G.I.s off the base. Japan had all those. They had houses of ill repute and bars. They had everything, yeah. At that time, everything in Japan was fairly cheap. The Americans kind of controlled everything. We didn't have any problems in Japan except for May Day—May Day demonstrations. They wouldn't let us off the base on May Day for something like ten days—five days before and five days afterwards. But outside of that, we had no restrictions. You could go to Tokyo.

I took a vacation down to a friend of mine, and I bought a motorcycle and went to the capital, Osaka, I guess it is—cherry blossom festival. Took us two days to get there. It was only 60, 70 miles, but we got lost two or three times. That area of Japan where we were at, nobody spoke English and we didn't speak very good Japanese at the time. So, it took us two days to get 70 miles. So, when we got ready to go back home, I sold my half of this motorcycle to friend, George, for just about nothing. I rode the train back to Johnson Air Force Base. He drove his motorcycle, and he was AWOL [Absent Without Official Leave] for two whole days. [laughs] Just as much trouble getting back as it was going down. Yeah.

We spent two five-day vacations in Hong Kong. George had a friend that was in the embassy in Hong Kong. He put us up in the embassy every time we went down there, took a mass flight. Spent five days in Hong Kong, which was very, very enjoyable at the time. Had a lot of fun there. Actually, all of them, most of the TDY excursions I had were good. They were fun. Visited a lot of, like Wake Island. We was only there about four days, I think, in a week, before they dropped an atomic bomb on it after that. We were just there to prepare some stuff for an experiment and what have you. I can't remember why I was at Midway, but I was at Midway for two days one time. I was thinking the other day, I can't remember—I can remember being there, but I can't remember why we were there. Whether I was just in route from Hawaii or...I remember flying over it and looking down and seeing all the wrecked boats and stuff in the water around Midway. You could see into the water probably 100 feet—water was that clear. All those sunken ships and what have you that was there—machinery.

Other than that, well, I guess, we did have—we were going to the Philippine Islands once, TDY, and it was in a DC-3 C-47—21 of us—with all of our electronic tools and what have you, which consisted of a toolbox that weighed about 50 pounds with test equipment and what have you. Screw drivers, and regular small tools for electronics. We had about 18 or 20 of those boxes plus 21 people and their gear. We had our duffle bags with us, which couldn't weigh any more than 75 pounds apiece, by regulation. We lost an engine going between Okinawa and the Philippine Island, and it looked like we were going to have to bail out of the airplane. Everybody got parachutes on, and they jettisoned all of our tools and half of our baggage to get rid of the weight. About 15 minutes before we were going to have to jump, the island—Philippine Islands—appeared. I'll be damned if we didn't just barely make it.

Yeah, that was scary because looking down, that sea was pretty rough. It was probably eight-foot swells—choppy swells, lots of wind, you know. Yeah, that was probably the scariest part of my whole career right there. I knew that probably half of us probably wouldn't survive that.

None of us had ever jumped before. Why we even had parachutes on the plane, I guess it was a regulation or something. We just strapped them on. They told us, "Here's the ring. Jump out and pull the ring." Yeah. Anyway, we made it.

JH: Did you ever keep in contact with anybody that you met?

HD: Yeah. Not with the ones that I was in Japan with, but one in Great Falls, I'm still a good friend of his, his name is Odie Bourquin [Orval "Odie" Bourquin]. He was from Missoula. We became good friends in Great Falls and went did a lot of fishing and hunting together, because we had the same local interests. Then when I got discharged, I went to work for a couple of landscaping outfits, and I worked for my uncle on the governor's farm a little bit, and I worked for Cut Bank Flying Service. Then I was thinking about using my G.I. bill for flight training for airline pilot, but my brother got in an airplane accident, working for the flying service at the same time I was—pretty near killed him. My family became alarmed that I was going to be a pilot too and all that went on down the line. So, I got a lot of pressure to go to college instead of being an airline pilot. That's why I came to college. Anyway, I came over here and Odie Bourquin was living here, and we immediately got together. He later owned a service station downtown. We did a lot of hunting and fishing together. Participated in a lot of things together. I still talk to him on the phone once and a while. He lives just outside of Portland, Oregon, right now—Milwaukie. I talked to him about six months ago, I guess. He's the same age as I am, but he hasn't quit smoking yet, so I think he's probably in pretty tough shape. Very heavy smoker. I quit smoking when I was 55 years old, I guess. That's probably the only reason I'm alive today.

Want one of them?

JH: Yeah, I'll have one in a bit.

HD: What else you got there?

JH: What was the treatment upon coming home from [unintelligible]—

HD: It was good. It was good in them days. It wasn't that long after the Korean War. The Korean War and the people didn't object to that or anything, because the Koreans actually first started that war. We just kind of defended them. I didn't have any problem with the population when I came home. None whatsoever. Nothing like they had with the Vietnam War, or probably the Iraq War or any of those. The political climate in the United States then was a whole lot different than it is now.

JH: Right. So, how do you think the military affected how your life ended up?

HD: It affected it quite a bit. I was probably a renegade, what you call a renegade, before I went in the service. I wasn't when I got out. They took that part out of you, out of your life. It was either the military way or the brig—there was no two choices. Those were the two choices you

had. You could go to the brig, or you could conform. I doubt if it's like that anymore or not. I don't think there was maybe one or two or three of what they called a Section 8 cases, which was you were just unfit for anything, you weren't even fit for military life, so they discharged you with what they call a dishonorable discharge. I think I only seen one or two of those my time in the service at that time. I don't know what the rate is in right now, or whether they even do it anymore or not. I have no idea. I don't think the military hurt anybody. I think it helped a lot of people. In my case, it did. I had the G.I. bill when I got out. That helped quite a bit. What school teaches you is to put the horse before the cart—that's all. General knowledge of all situations. How to organize yourself and all your activities and what have you. Teaches you personal hygiene and everything that goes along with it.

JH: You think it helped out with the crane company [D&G Crane Service] at all?

HD: Did it help out with it?

JH: Yeah.

HD: Oh, yeah. Mostly just the self discipline. When things look bad, just grit your teeth and keep going. I kind of had that in the very beginning anyway. I hated to quit anything. Even when you're fishing or hunting, I hated to quit if you wasn't successful. I'm still that way to the crane company anyway or any company, anything I try to do, I try to see it completely through before I go on to the next project or whatever. Yeah, I'm still at it that way, just that it takes me a lot longer to get it done. [laughs] Anyway, I'm satisfied with what I've accomplished, mostly, yeah. A few things I'm not too proud of, but most the part I am. The military had a lot to do with that, I think. When you go into the military, you are in a pretty impressionable part of your life, when you're at that age, 18 to 24 years old, where you really form an opinion about what you're going to do and what you're going to be and what you want to be—what you want out of life. In that age group is where you have those decisions to make. That helps you make them. What you really want to do. If I had it to do all over again, I'd still do the same thing. Yeah, no problem. I think that the military—I don't know how it is this day and age to tell you the truth. I can see they send these kids to Iraq or Iran or Saudi Arabia or whatever. They have different rules now. They have what they call rules of engagement. All of it's police warfare and extremely political. It's always been political, but not to the extent that it is now, right now. So, I don't know how it is today to tell you the truth, but back then, I think it was great. I think it was a great experience for a young man. I'd do it over again if it's under the same circumstances.

Anything else?

JH: No. That's it.

[End of Interview]