

Stephen E. Katz '56
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Karen Navarro

SCHNEIDER: This is Walker Schneider [19] with the Dartmouth Vietnam Project, interviewing Colonel Stephen Katz. It is March 9th, 2018. I'm in the Ticknor Room of Rauner [Special Collections] Library in Hanover, New Hampshire. And Steve is in Rancho Palos Verdes in California. And before we get started, Steve, I just wanted to thank you for participating in this project. I'm looking forward to our talk.

KATZ: Well, yeah, so am I.

SCHNEIDER: All right. So, to begin, let's just go over some basic biographical information. When and where were you born?

KATZ: I was born in New York City in 1935.

SCHNEIDER: And what was your family like? What did your parents do?

KATZ: Well, my mother was a homemaker. My father was—this sounds funny—see, my father was in ladies' clothing. My father was in the garment business. And his company, in later years he was an executive with Izod, which is the company that has the little alligators on the pockets.

SCHNEIDER: Did your parents have any siblings with you?

KATZ: Any what?

SCHNEIDER: Did you have any siblings?

KATZ: Siblings?

SCHNEIDER: Yeah.

KATZ: I have an older sister that's five years older than I am.

SCHNEIDER: And what's her name?

KATZ: Her name? Joan.

SCHNEIDER: So, were you old enough to remember anything about World War II and what it was like to grow up during that?

KATZ: I do. I have a cousin who was killed in France in World War II. And I have other members of my family that served in World War II. My father was a veteran of World War I.

SCHNEIDER: And where did he serve during World War I?

KATZ: He was in the Navy. He enlisted when he was 17, and he served until the Armistice was when he was 18. So, he was not in combat, but he was in uniform.

SCHNEIDER: And, by the way, just what were the full names of both of your parents?

KATZ: My father's name was Abraham Katz and my mother's name was Elsie.

SCHNEIDER: So, then you enter high school in the post-war era in the beginning of the Cold War. What was that like going to high school in the early years of the Cold War?

KATZ: Actually, I didn't go to high school. I went to a prep school.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, okay. What was going to prep school like?

KATZ: It was very nice. It was in Pennsylvania. I was a little young. I was only 14 when I left home to go to prep school, and I was there for three years in Pennsylvania, a very nice school called the Mercersburg Academy [Mercersburg, PA], and it was an all-male school at the time. It's now co-ed. And a beautiful campus, and it was a good staging ground for me to get into Dartmouth.

SCHNEIDER: Why did you and your family decide to send you to a prep school instead of the local high school?

KATZ: Just because it was a better education. And I had a better shot at getting into a good college because I was a prep school graduate, as opposed to public school.

SCHNEIDER: And did you welcome getting sent away?

KATZ: I don't think I did. I mean, then I was 14 and that's kind of young to be cut loose. But it worked out.

- SCHNEIDER: So, then, what made you settle on Dartmouth? What was that decision process like?
- KATZ: That was not my choice. I did not want to go to Dartmouth. My mother was one of those—my mother listens to people’s advice, and somebody told her, “Oh, Dartmouth’s a wonderful place for Steve. He’ll make lots of friends and he’ll have a good time there, and he’ll learn to ski,” and all those things. I was accepted at Yale [University, New Haven, CT], and I wanted to—I’m a city guy, as opposed to being out in the sticks. Hanover was really nothing in those days, about two blocks’ worth of stores, and just not much to do. And I was just used to the big city, New York, and that’s kind of what I like. I like the excitement of that, and I didn’t like being out in the boondocks. So, I didn’t want to go to Dartmouth, and I am not a loyal alumnus of Dartmouth.
- SCHNEIDER: So, what was it like when you were talking with your parents when they told you they wanted you to go to Dartmouth, but you wanted to go to Yale?
- KATZ: Oh, it was just kind of a, you know, “We think that’s best for you and we’re paying for it, so you’re going to Dartmouth.” Not that abrupt, but that was kind of the implication.
- SCHNEIDER: Right. So, therefore, what was your arrival on campus like in the fall of 1952?
- KATZ: A new world, and I’d never been in Pennsylvania. It was a very large campus, and it took me a while just to get used to it. And the one thing that I didn’t like about Dartmouth, I was assigned to a single room in Woodward Hall, as opposed to having a roommate. Having a roommate would have made things a lot more pleasant. But I didn’t have a roommate, and I was kind of all alone. That’s a hard thing to adjust to when you’re 14. It’s hard enough to make friends in a strange place, but a roommate could at least break the ice. And it just made it difficult.
- SCHNEIDER: I’m sorry, was that about Mercersburg or Dartmouth?
- KATZ: Actually, it was at Dartmouth. I’m sorry, I shifted gears on you there.

SCHNEIDER: No worries. So, was your first year lonely? What was it like as a freshman without a roommate?

KATZ: Are we talking about Dartmouth now?

SCHNEIDER: Yes, sir.

KATZ: Not great. I didn't like the weather. It was very cold and snowy, and I'm not a cold weather guy. That's why I live in California now. And let's see, I started Dartmouth when I was 17, and it was just a lot of stuff thrown at me. I'm not sure I was ready for college. But, the three years in prep school kind of conditioned me for it, I suppose.

SCHNEIDER: Did you have a hard time adjusting to the academics as well as the social, or was one more difficult than the other?

KATZ: Oh, the social was more difficult than the other. Dartmouth had a small population of Jewish students. Although I was not religious, I was still Jewish, and the atmosphere was not terribly welcoming for Jewish students. There were only two or three fraternities that would take blacks or Jews, and in the entire class of 1956 we had two black students.

SCHNEIDER: What was it therefore like to go to Dartmouth when the civil rights movement was picking up steam, with only two black students in your entire class?

KATZ: They were nice guys, as I recall. But, as I said, there were only two fraternities that were welcoming to minorities. I was in a fraternity that was not one of those two. I was in a fraternity that's no longer there, Phi Kappa Psi. And I wasn't happy with the fraternity. It was not very welcoming, and I was not interested in drinking a lot of booze and things like that. I never lived in the fraternity. I lived in the dormitory, Woodward Hall, for all four years on the second floor, three different rooms.

SCHNEIDER: Besides the drinking, what made you feel unwelcomed at Phi Kappa Psi?

KATZ: I'm not a social guy. I'm not a person that has a whole lot of friends and gets involved in social activities. I'm very happy sitting at home reading a book as I am going out and dealing with people. So, Dartmouth... I was in a single room and was just in there studying. I didn't find a whole lot of things to

do besides study. I did take a shot at skiing, because my parents insisted on how much fun that was going to be. And I just barely avoided killing myself on the skis. [laughter] I'm not particularly athletic. And I remember one thing, going down the hill and falling down two or three times, and a little kid about six years old skiing up to me and said [in a high pitched voice], "Can I help you, mister?" And shortly after that, I took my skis and put them in the basement of Woodward Hall and never used them again.

SCHNEIDER: Looping back to your original statement, do you remember what two fraternities were open to accepting minorities?

KATZ: Basically, there were two fraternities at Dartmouth that accepted Jewish students: Pi Lambda Phi and Sigma Phi Epsilon.

SCHNEIDER: Interesting. So, did you participate in any other sort of societies or activities while at Dartmouth outside of Phi Kappa Psi?

KATZ: I'm sorry, say that again, please? I don't hear very well, so...

SCHNEIDER: No worries. Any time you don't hear something, just ask me to repeat it. The original question was: did you participate in any other sort of activities or societies while at Dartmouth outside of your fraternity?

KATZ: Well, ROTC.

SCHNEIDER: Right. Can you talk to me about that a little bit? What was that experience like at Dartmouth?

KATZ: I started out in Army ROTC for the first two years and I enjoyed it. It was a good unit and it was a small unit. There weren't many students enrolled. You have to understand that in the 1950s, a lot of kids were getting drafted into the Army, and one way of beating the draft was to be in college, and being in ROTC, because kids could be drafted out of college, but if you were at ROTC, you were safe. So, I joined the Army ROTC. And at the start of the junior year, the Army announced that the only people that could continue in the unit were if you were a business major or—oh, I'm trying to think what the other one was—if you were majoring in business or, I forget what the other thing was now, then you could stay in the unit. If not, you were out.

SCHNEIDER: And what was your major?

KATZ: My major was English. But, if you were either business or one of the sciences, you could stay on the Army unit because it was an Army ordnance unit, and that's what ordnances deals with. So, I went over to the Air Force [ROTC] and they were kind enough to accept me in the Air Force unit. And it was a great unit. It was a small unit. They had three or four officers who were great, very fine people, and I still remember the commander of the unit was a colonel, Colonel [Murvale T.] Farrar. And I got to go to ROTC summer camp, and I got to fly in a jet, which was very exciting. And, so it turned out to be a great thing for me to get out of the Army and get into the Air Force. I thoroughly enjoyed my 30 years in the Air Force.

SCHNEIDER: So, can I ask why, then, you decided to join the ROTC in the first place?

KATZ: I think part of it was so I wouldn't be drafted. I was willing to serve in the military, but I certainly would prefer to serve as an officer instead of enlisted. And when you graduated from ROTC, you were commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant.

SCHNEIDER: So, did your father's military service have any influence on you?

KATZ: No, not really. He did not go into combat. He was too young to go into combat, so he spent his year and a half in the Navy which he spent in and around New York the whole time.

SCHNEIDER: So, did Dartmouth feel especially isolated from events that were occurring in the world at this time? Or were you acutely aware of what was going on in the US and around you?

KATZ: Oh, yeah, I used to read the *New York Times* every day, so I was completely aware.

SCHNEIDER: What were your thoughts about the US's interference and intervention across the globe? Were you a fan of it? Did you question it?

KATZ: Oh, yeah, I was a fan, absolutely. After all, the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor, so, you know, everybody was

on board with it. Americans were, as I recall, very supportive of the military, with the exception of the draft dodgers that went to Canada.

SCHNEIDER: Were there any of those that you knew from Dartmouth?

KATZ: I'm sorry, what...

SCHNEIDER: No worries. Did you know of any draft dodgers at Dartmouth?

KATZ: No, I don't think so.

SCHNEIDER: So, then, Steve, you graduate in 1956 and are commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in the Air Force. What happens next?

KATZ: Well, I asked for an early call-up to active duty. You had a choice. If somebody wanted to go to graduate school, they would give you an exemption to go to graduate school. They'd let you delay your acceptance in active duty. But I wanted to get my military service over with. My plan was to spend the three-year service commitment, and I was accepted at Yale Business School [Yale School of Management, New Haven, CT], and they delayed my matriculation for three years, because I was going into the service, and so my plan was to do my three years in the Air Force, and go to Yale and be a lawyer. But, my whole life changed when I... Well, I may have skipped around a little bit. Let's go back to when I graduated Dartmouth. I went to flying school and I became a navigator.

SCHNEIDER: Where did you go to flying school?

KATZ: I went to flying school at Harlingen Air Force Base in Texas. When I joined the Air Force, I had never been west of central Pennsylvania, so driving to Texas was like going to Mars as far as I was concerned. I'd never had any exposure at all to anything like that, anything west of Pennsylvania. I had been to Cuba. My father took us on a fishing trip on spring break to Cuba. So, we went to Florida and Cuba. But, I'd never been, as I said, west of Pennsylvania. So, I didn't even know the streets were paved when you cross into Ohio. It was, like I said, landing on Mars. It was just terrific. I felt like Alice in Wonderland.

SCHNEIDER: So, you then go to Harlingen Air Force Base. What was flight school like? What was learning to be a navigator like? Was it more difficult than your training at Dartmouth?

KATZ: What, flying school?

SCHNEIDER: Yeah.

KATZ: Not really. It was a lot of technical stuff, which wasn't my forte. I was a liberal arts major. You know, studying about aerodynamics and things like that, it was difficult, but it wasn't that tough. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed my 30 years in the Air Force. But, I had no intention of, as I said, staying more than the three years. And then, after my year at Harlingen, I graduated, I got my wings, and I went to my first assignment, which was in Kansas. And that was another strange place. I was stationed at Schilling Air Force Base in Salina, Kansas. And I was a big city kid, New York City and Long Island, and here I am in Kansas, a little town... There's an echo on this phone.

SCHNEIDER: There's an echo where?

KATZ: There's an echo on the phone.

SCHNEIDER: Is it still echoing?

KATZ: Everything I say is being echoed. No, it's stopped now. No, it didn't. It's still on. But, it's okay.

SCHNEIDER: Okay, I think I fixed it. Keep going.

KATZ: Anyway, so where am I? I'm in Kansas. Strategic Air Command was a big thing in the Air Force. We had [Boeing] B-47 [Stratojet] bombers and [Boeing] KC-97 tankers. And I was in the tanker squadron. Our job was air refueling airplanes, which was exciting, too. And the first year we spent 90 days on alert in Canada, which was colder than hell as I recall. But, again, my intention was to spend three years and go to law school. But, a strange thing happened to me. The summer of 1959, I was a big swimming and lying and sunbathing guy. I worked summers at Jones Beach State Park in Long Island, and loved to hang out at the pool wherever I was. And I went to the officers' club pool at Schilling Air Force Base, and I was lying in the sun, and I hear this girl's voice saying, "Bring your radio over here. I

want to listen to your music.” So, I did. And there was this very pretty girl there, and it turned out she was an Air Force nurse. And 30 days after that we got married.

SCHNEIDER: 30 days?

KATZ: 30 days. And that blew my graduate school plans right out of the water.

SCHNEIDER: So, can you explain how you went from bringing your radio over to this girl to marrying her, all within a month?

KATZ: Well, we just decided we were very compatible, or lonely, I suppose. She was, Pat was a very personable person, but I was kind of a loner. I'd never really had a girlfriend that I was seriously interested in. And we just kind of hit it off after I guess after about three weeks. I was on alert, and when you're alert, you spend seven days in alert quarters and, believe it or not, you have 15 minutes to go from the alert quarters—you can be sound asleep—and 15 minutes later you have to be in your airplane with all four engines started. And, it sounds a little hard to believe that we could do that, but we did. Anyway, I was on alert one Saturday night, and Pat—Pat was her name, and she's now deceased—Pat stopped off at the alert bar and we sat and talked for a while, and on the spur of the moment, I said, “Will you marry me?” And she said “yes,” which astonished me. And I said, “Well, how about next Friday?” She said, “Okay.” And we didn't have much preparation, it was that sudden. So, she was, Pat was also a lieutenant in the Air Force, and she immediately went on leave.

And Sunday, the day after this proposal, Sunday she went downtown to downtown Salina, which is a city of about 30,000 people. And Pat was a very gregarious person. She knew everybody. And the guy in the jewelry store gave her a whole tray of rings and a little device for sizing, and he brought the rings out and we picked out our rings, and they're in the alert box. I'm still wearing my wedding ring right now. My wife is deceased, by the way. But, we had matching wedding rings. And we didn't have a church, we didn't have a license, we didn't have anything. We didn't have a place to stay, honeymoon or anything like that. So, that was Sunday, she got the rings and we picked our rings. And Monday, let's see, I guess Monday was the ring thing. On Tuesday, we went down and got—no, Tuesday, I was off

alert and we went downtown. It was a three day wait to get a marriage license in Kansas, so we went down and applied for our licenses, and we were running around. We didn't have a church, we didn't have a minister, we didn't have a place to go. [laughter] And it was just a lot of running around to do, and arrange the wedding. I didn't have a best man or a matron of honor or any of that stuff. So, we were organizing all that.

And I told my parents. We didn't have any family come out. My best friend was my best man, a guy from my squadron. Pat had another nurse as her matron of honor. And I think there were probably, aside from Pat and I, there were probably two couples on each side of the bride and groom. We could have held the wedding in a closet. It was in the First Methodist Church in Salina, Kansas. And had a nice service and then we took off to Wichita, and that was our honeymoon. I had three days off before I was scheduled to fly again. Then came back and I was back to reality. Pat was back to the hospital as a nurse and I was back to flying. We had an apartment, and we went to—we deployed for 90 days to Goose Bay-Labrador, and stood alert for the 90 days, and came back.

SCHNEIDER: So, two questions. First, what was Pat's full name?

KATZ: Her maiden name was Patricia Ann Schwab, S-c-h-w-a-b.

SCHNEIDER: And then she became Patricia Ann Schwab Katz?

KATZ: Patricia Ann. No, she changed her last name to Katz.

SCHNEIDER: Okay, and then, follow-up question. How did your parents react to you telling them you got married?

KATZ: They were stunned.

SCHNEIDER: Stunned?

KATZ: Stunned, yeah. And two months later, we took some leave and drove back east to meet her parents and my parents, and I don't know, it wasn't love at first sight for either couple, I would say. My parents, they had wanted a big wedding and the whole family and that kind of stuff, as opposed to I guess what I guess you would call an elopement. So, it wasn't terribly great as far as the family was concerned. But, you

know, I didn't have to live with them anymore. I was halfway across the country.

SCHNEIDER: Right. So, then, for the next three years before you get orders to go to Vietnam, what was life like? Were you just bouncing from base to base?

KATZ: No, we didn't move from Kansas. Again, as I was saying, my plan originally was to spend three years in and then go to Yale, and now all of a sudden I couldn't afford a wife and graduate school, so I had the opportunity to get a regular Air Force commission, as opposed to being a reserve officer, which the ROTC is the Reserve Officer Training Corps, and when you graduate, the more promising graduates were offered a chance to join the regular Air Force. And it looked like the only way I was going to be able to support a wife was to get a regular commission and then stay in the service. So, that was what we did.

And Pat was still an Air Force nurse. In fact, she made captain. She had been in service five months longer than I, so she made captain a year before I did. And that was for the rest of her life a family joke about her outranking me. It was all good, you know, all good-natured. And I was glad that she did, because it was more money coming in. And the Air Force didn't pay terribly well. My base pay as a 2nd lieutenant was \$222 a month, plus \$100 flying pay, and then \$47 subsistence. So, it was kind of a bare bones existence. But, fortunately we also had Pat's pay. Pat stayed in for about 10 years, until after I made major, and then she decided that she didn't want to work anymore and she didn't need to work anymore, so I needed her full-time supervision. So, there we were.

SCHNEIDER: So, in these kind of interlude years, when did you start to become aware of the situation in Vietnam?

KATZ: In the early 1960s. Let me transition from Kansas. I applied for pilot school. I was a navigator. I applied for pilot school. It turned out that I just wasn't suited for flying, for being a pilot, and I went back to being a navigator. And I was transferred to—what was my second base? I should have written notes down, because my memory is failing me badly. Where did we go? Oh, Tennessee, yeah. We were assigned to Sewart Air Force Base in Tennessee, about 30 miles below Nashville, south of Nashville. And Pat went to work at the Air

Force Hospital and I went to the 66th Troop Carrier Squadron. I was flying a KC-97 tanker.

SCHNEIDER: What year was this?

KATZ: This would have been 1962. And we were at Schilling [Air Force Base, Salina, KS] from 1962 to 1968, and I went from being a 1st lieutenant to a captain to a major, all at Schilling.

SCHNEIDER: So, when did you get the orders to go to Vietnam?

KATZ: Well, in 1968, I had the opportunity to apply for graduate school, so I applied for Syracuse [University, Syracuse, NY], and I got my master's degree with honors. I was an honor graduate of Syracuse with an MBA. And from there I went—actually I had orders to the Philippines, and I told them that no, I wanted to go to Vietnam, so they changed it and assigned me to the rescue service in an air base called Tuy Hoa [Air Base]. And it's spelled T-u-y H-o-a, two words, and, of course, in South Vietnam. It was a Vietnamese base. It was a very, very small base on the coast about halfway up the Vietnam coast. And we flew air refueling missions. Our job was to air refuel bombers, and that's what we did.

SCHNEIDER: So, going back a little bit there, Steve, first of all, back to Syracuse. What made you want to get your MBA now instead of your JD? What was that decision?

KATZ: Well, the MBA was—the idea was to build a credential that would impress the promotion board. So, an officer with a master's degree was more likely to get promoted than someone who did not have a graduate degree. And going back a ways, the Air Force in the 1950s and '60s and actually earlier, a lot of the officers were retreads from World War II, guys that had gotten out after World War II, and then went back in in the Korean War. Very old captains and majors, mostly commissioned through the Aviation Cadet Program, which required only a high school education. So, I was competing for promotion against guys who did not have college degrees, and especially not from an Ivy League college. And the idea was to build as strong a resume as you possibly could for the promotion board. So, an MBA was more than a basic degree and it was worth more. Of course, a doctorate was, but not many guys got doctorates. Not many line officers got doctorates. So, I went to Syracuse, did well at Syracuse, and from Syracuse I went to Vietnam. Flew

over a hundred combat missions, got a distinguished flying cross and a bunch of air medals, while Pat stayed in Nashville.

SCHNEIDER: So, Steve, what made you want to switch your orders from the Philippines to Vietnam? Why did you want to go specifically to Vietnam?

KATZ: Well, that's where the action was. You know, spending your time in Hawaii, for example, was not... The chance of getting promoted was a hell of a lot better if you had combat on your resume than if you didn't. And I was looking to get promoted. After all, I had a wife to support, and my chances of getting promoted were a lot better if I had a combat tour. In fact, I volunteered and went back to Vietnam for a second tour, and I extended my tour. I took a six month extension, because the tour was normally—the base tour was, as I recall, about a year and a half, and I extended. I stayed for two years, took an extra six month extension. And another reason was you got extra pay. In Vietnam, they had some good financial programs. Whatever portion of your pay, you could designate a portion of your pay to go into the USSDP, the [Uniform Services] Savings Deposit Program, and you got 10% interest on the money.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, wow.

KATZ: Yeah, it was pretty good.

SCHNEIDER: That's pretty good, yeah.

KATZ: Yeah, and I was living on, you know, three dollars a day eating in the mess hall, and so I had a lot of money to save, and Pat, of course, was living on her salary as an Air Force captain. So, we saved a lot of money, and it enabled us to buy the house that I'm living in right now.

SCHNEIDER: Did you guys have any children by this point, or ever?

KATZ: No, we never had children. Only dogs.

SCHNEIDER: So, that was a conscious decision, then?

KATZ: Yeah, I think so. Well, one thing you had to understand was the law in those days was that—it was very parochial—if a woman got pregnant, she had to leave the service. And if a

woman married a man who had been previously married and had a child, she had to leave the service. She became that child's mother, and the point of view of the government was a woman's place was in the home. And so, Pat, that was one reason why we didn't have children at the time, because Pat didn't want to leave the service.

SCHNEIDER: Okay, that makes sense, then. So, now going back to your two tours, what were the dates of your two tours?

KATZ: Well, let me see. I guess 1970 to 1972, and then I went back after I graduated from Syracuse—when was that?

SCHNEIDER: That was 1970, I believe.

KATZ: Yeah.

SCHNEIDER: It says on your biography that you sent us that you graduated in 1970, so that was one tour, from 1970 to 1972. When was the other?

KATZ: That's a good question. I'm not sure.

SCHNEIDER: Was it before or after your time at Syracuse?

KATZ: It was after.

SCHNEIDER: Okay. So, was it after the ceasefire, then?

KATZ: After what?

SCHNEIDER: After the ceasefire?

KATZ: No, there was still a war going on.

SCHNEIDER: Interesting. All right, well, if at any point you remember, just interject and let me know.

KATZ: I'm sorry, say that again.

SCHNEIDER: If at any point you remember those dates, interject and let me know.

KATZ: Okay.

SCHNEIDER: So, can we talk about the combat missions you ran as an air refueler? What were those like?

KATZ: Well, let's see. We were a rescue operation, and what we would do, our job was to support the recovery of downed airmen. And that was a very exciting job. So, let's say a plane was shot down in the jungles of Vietnam or Laos, or even Thailand, ideally the survivors would have a radio, and they would radio that they needed help, and the Air Force would launch small what they called "slow movers," the single-engine prop planes, to locate the survivors. Once they located the survivors, then it was an all-out effort to secure the area around them to kill anybody that was trying to capture them. Sometimes they were successful and sometimes they weren't.

And our job was to—we were an air refueling squad—and our job was to get on scene, and those airplanes that were involved in the rescue operation, our job was to refuel them. And the idea was that if you were engaged in protecting the survivors, in other words, shooting anybody that moved in a hostile manner on the ground, the survivors were in a jungle environment, so the rescue aircraft knew where the survivors were, but if they had to fly back to a base to refuel, there was two or three hours where they were off the scene. Whereas, if they had a tanker, they could refuel from us, and then go right back to where they were, where they left off. So, that was the whole reason for having tanker squadrons. But, we would fly to a safe altitude, and the aircraft would hook up to what we called a "probe and drogue" situation. Under each wing we had a pod from which you unreel a drogue, a shoot, and once it was deployed, it would slip stream in the air flow, and the fighter had a probe on the wing which would hook into our shoot, and we would transfer fuel to it. And that meant that the fighter, instead of having to fly all the way back to the base and refuel, the fighter was virtually—never had to leave the scene of the survivor. And, so we would fill them up and go back to our base until we were needed again.

SCHNEIDER: Was that a dangerous process?

KATZ: Yeah, it was, because when you're refueling a helicopter, you flew at a fairly low altitude, which made you pretty vulnerable. And we never lost an airplane, but we did lose some helicopters and we did lose some what they called

slow movers, the little airplanes that had the machine gun and maybe a cannon to try and ward off the aggressors. So, it was a very dangerous mission. And we didn't lose any tankers, but we did lose a lot of the support aircraft.

SCHNEIDER: Did you guys ever take fire personally, the tankers?

KATZ: Not that I'm aware of. We may have been shot at, but nobody ever hit us.

SCHNEIDER: So, I see on your blurb, by the way, you mentioned you had a rescue operation in the Philippine Sea. How did that differ from your normal operations?

KATZ: Well, the difference between a normal operation is that there were no aggressors. In other words, we weren't worried about being shot at. That was just a strange mission. A sailor had fallen through a hatch into his vessel, and had been badly injured, and they needed to air evac him back to a hospital. And, so we had deployed two tankers, a C-130, which was what I was flying, the C-130, so we had two C-130s and some escort aircraft. We flew out, we located the ship, and by that time they'd brought the survivor out of the hole, and when he was on the deck, one of the helicopters in our formation lowered a hoist and brought the survivor into that airplane, and then we refueled the slow mover again, and flew back to the mainland to Da Nang, and they took the survivor to the hospital in Da Nang.

SCHNEIDER: So, what corps were you operating normally out of?

KATZ: What corps?

SCHNEIDER: Yeah.

KATZ: I don't know. We didn't really use that distinction.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, that was more an infantry distinction?

KATZ: Yeah. Yeah. But, we were based again at Tuy Hoa, and then our squad had moved to Cam Ranh Bay, which was a very large base, something that nobody really wanted to do, because you were kind of lost. Tuy Hoa was a nice little base. At lunchtime I would actually walk up to my quarters and put on a bathing suit and go into the South China Sea

and go swimming, go back to my quarters, take a shower, put my uniform on and go back to the squadron.

SCHNEIDER: So, were you a navigator during this time still?

KATZ: I was a navigator. I've always been a navigator, never a pilot.

SCHNEIDER: So, all these combat missions you flew, did it change your perceptions about... Well, I guess the main question is, is obviously you, as a young man, had heard about Vietnam throughout the entire 1960s. How did the reality of your Vietnam match your expectations?

KATZ: It wasn't as bad as I thought it might be. We weren't...

SCHNEIDER: Why is that?

KATZ: Well, you know, we didn't lose any aircraft out of my squadron. Nobody was injured. The aircraft we were supporting took the brunt of the hostility. Even though we were in a combat zone, we were not a target.

SCHNEIDER: Did you operate at all with ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] and any South Vietnamese troops? Did you interact with them at all?

KATZ: No. I had no dealing with them at all.

SCHNEIDER: So, going back to my earlier question about your thoughts on American interventionism abroad while you were at college, had those thoughts changed in Vietnam or because of Vietnam? Did you believe the United States should have been involved?

KATZ: Oh, yeah, sure. I did. And this is going to sound kind of dumb to you, but I kind of welcomed the opportunity to fight in a war. I volunteered to go to Vietnam on both occasions when I didn't have to, although it's a little bit misleading, because if I'd been stationed in the Philippines, I'd still be flying in Vietnam. But the difference being that I was stationed in country, as opposed to being stationed in the Philippines. And again, that's something that looked better on your resume, that you served in Vietnam, and I served two tours in Vietnam, as opposed to one. And not only was I making more money, but I was adding to, I was padding my

resume, and also doing work that I thought—you know, I was helping to save lives, which was really the whole reason for being over there.

SCHNEIDER: So, speaking of saving lives, can you talk about your participation and your role in the evacuations that you mentioned?

KATZ: Yeah. Let me go back to the rescues. I was credited—I and my crew were credited with 28 combat rescues of individuals, and one the sailor I mentioned. So, that was something I was very proud of that we actually rescued. And I will tell you that one of the biggest thrills I ever had was one of the survivors was brought back to Thailand, and we had—I have to skip around a little bit and explain our mission a little bit. Every morning we would deploy an airplane to Thailand, the KC-97 to Thailand, and every day we had two airplanes in Thailand and we had two airplanes in Vietnam and they were on alert. And the idea was, if you were in one of those airplanes, you would be alert until there was an incident, somebody was shot down and you got a survivor situation, and then we would launch our airplanes to react to the scene. So, you were actually on alert all the daylight hours from sunrise to sunset. There would be two airplanes in Vietnam and two airplanes in Thailand, and from dawn to dusk, and you'd rotate back and forth from Thailand to Vietnam. So, we would spend, out of a month we would spend probably one week in Thailand. I don't know if I'm painting a picture of it, if you can visualize it.

SCHNEIDER: No, I'm with you, yeah.

KATZ: And going to Thailand was a break for us because, number one, they took American money. In Vietnam we used MPC, which was their kind of—they didn't want American money flowing into the hands of the Vietnamese, so we used what they called MPC, military payment certificates, and they were all in different denominations. We could use coins, but there was an MPC dollar and a five dollar bill and a 10 dollar bill and a 20 dollar bill. And when you went to Thailand, you could use American money, as opposed to MPC. And every so often they would have a no notice currency swap, where all the MPC that you had in your pocket had to be turned in for new money. It was to combat the black market.

SCHNEIDER: Right.

KATZ: Now, if I sound a little vague, understand I'm going back to the 1960s.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah, no worries.

KATZ: When I was in my 20s and my 30s. So, now I'll be 83 next week. So, my memory...

SCHNEIDER: Well, congratulations, first of all.

KATZ: My memories are a little bit vague.

SCHNEIDER: So, no worries. So, therefore, you're flying back between Vietnam and Thailand, conducting all of these rescue operations. When does this help with the evacuations take place? How does that factor in?

KATZ: Well, that was, of course, at the end of the... There was a truce, and we flew—are you talking about the POWs?

SCHNEIDER: Well, what I'm referring to is when you submitted a blurb to the Dartmouth Vietnam Project, and said on the last day of before the ceasefire, you and your crew helped evacuate approximately 150 Vietnamese citizens out of South Vietnam and on their way to California.

KATZ: Yeah. We also evacuated American servicemen who had been prisoners of war.

SCHNEIDER: Can you go into detail about that?

KATZ: Unfortunately, I missed those, because I was hospitalized. I had my gall bladder removed, and so I was grounded for about a month and a half. I couldn't fly.

SCHNEIDER: This was in 1972?

KATZ: Yeah. So, I missed those POWs, and I will always regret missing those missions. But, I just couldn't help it. I did, in 1975, I did fly a couple of relocation missions.

SCHNEIDER: So, yeah, can you go into detail about those? These were relocation missions from out of Saigon?

KATZ: Yes, out of Saigon in 1975. The war was in its very last days, and a number of Vietnamese civilians who had— collaborated isn't the right word, but were employed in various capacities by the US, had to get the hell out of Vietnam because their lives were in danger. They would be shot by the North Vietnamese when they reoccupied the country.

SCHNEIDER: Right.

KATZ: So, we landed in Saigon, and it was a shuttle system. We flew from Saigon to—where did we go?—I think we went to Guam, yeah. We flew from Saigon to Guam, and then our people, our passengers would go and they'd transfer to another airplane that would go from Guam to Hawaii, and then there was another airplane that would take them on from Hawaii to the West Coast.

SCHNEIDER: Did you make multiple shuttles and runs with these, or was it all in one fell swoop?

KATZ: No, we shuttled back from Saigon to Guam, and then we'd go back to Saigon and pick up another load.

SCHNEIDER: And was this over the course of several days or one day?

KATZ: Yes. Yeah, there were a lot of people evacuated.

SCHNEIDER: Over the course of several days?

KATZ: And they're all running grocery stores in Orange County. Once you return to the West Coast, we have a large Vietnamese population in California now, and a lot of these are descendants of those survivors that we evacuated out of Vietnam. The airplane was packed. There were so many survivors on an airplane, they actually had no seats for them. They sat on the floor of the airplane, the hard metal floor of the airplane, and they would stretch a seatbelt across the longitudinal axis of the airplane in rows. So, they were sitting on the floor with everything they owned, everything they could carry out of Saigon. I'd be seating there next to them. They had little animals, dogs, and just crammed into the airplane.

And I really felt very empathetic toward them. You know, they kind of reminded me of my grandparents in the 1800s

leaving Russia to come to the United States, you know, and everything they owned was what they could carry in their suitcases. And it was kind of analogous to what these people were going through, a new world where they didn't speak the language in most cases, and they probably realized that they would never see some of their family members again, and going to a strange country with strange people and strange languages. And I was very pleased to have the opportunity to fly those missions, because I really admired the courage that these people displayed.

SCHNEIDER: So, then, in 1972, and then I guess in 1975, you returned to the United States after the war in Vietnam came to conclusion. Immediately upon returning, (a) what was return to the United States like, and what did you think of your role in Vietnam in the 1970s?

KATZ: I was very, very—I was honored to serve. I mean, that was what I joined the Air Force was to—not to fly into necessarily dangerous situations, but to make a contribution, and I felt that I did. And I was awarded. I was rewarded by promotions and medals and all that. Was able to put a little money into the bank. So, for me personally it was a very rewarding experience. I didn't kill anybody. You know, I didn't have to shoot anybody. I just dealt with saving lives. As I said before, we had 28 service members that we plucked from captivity or even death, and to this day I'll be thankful for having that opportunity to have done that. So, I have nothing but positive things to say about my service in Vietnam.

SCHNEIDER: Did you encounter any anti-war sentiment upon returning home?

KATZ: Yes, a little bit. I remember, in Vietnam if you extended your tour, if you took a six month extension, which I did, you got 30 days free leave in the United States, or you could go to any one of six or seven destinations. You could go to the United States, you could go to Thailand, you could go to Singapore, go to Korea. And it was just a seven-day rest and relaxation is what they called it, R&R.

SCHNEIDER: Right.

KATZ: So, I did two. I didn't go back to the States. I did one in Taipei [Taiwan]. I got some neat stuff here in the house from Taipei. I shipped back to Pat a bar, because they really

made some nice—and two chests, two storage chests that we still have. We still have the bar, and it was what they called an APO bar, and it came apart in five pieces, and each piece was the dimensions of what you could legally mail, not legally, but, you know, from a size standpoint that you could... So, they wrapped all these things, packed all these packages. The bar broke down to five pieces, four cabinets and the top. And I brought back, what else did I bring back? Let me see...And I brought back two storage chests. Each chest was a package and the two lids were one package. And so, they loaded all of this stuff into a taxi, and drove it to the airport and they flew it back. And I had visions of Pat getting all the packages, all the pieces of the bar except one and, you know, missing the lids on the chests or anything like that, but everything got back, and she figured out how to put it back together again. And, so we still have this very nice bar, and these two storage chests. That was from Taipei.

SCHNEIDER: So, did you encounter any anti-war sentiment while you were in Taipei then? Or on break?

KATZ: No. They were happy to have the Americans there and spending their money.

SCHNEIDER: So, you said you did encounter some anti-war sentiment. Where and when was that?

KATZ: Only really one incident. I was flying—my R&R, my 30 days, with the extension I got 30 days off, flew to California, spent some time with Pat. Then I flew to New York City to spend a few days with my parents, and on that flight we were wearing our uniforms because we got a discount with the airlines. And I was wearing my uniform and some teenager turned around and saw me in my uniform and started screaming at me, “Baby killer! Baby killer!” And finally somebody shut her up, and she just sat there for the rest of the flight. That was really the only experience that I had that was any hostility.

SCHNEIDER: Did you just sit silently while she was yelling that at you? Or did you try to explain that you flew rescue missions? How did you take that?

KATZ: No, I didn't. She just sat down, turned her back, and just left it there. I didn't feel like getting into all of—I didn't want to escalate it at all, so I just dropped it.

SCHNEIDER: So, after returning from Vietnam, you stay in the Air Force for roughly another 15 years. What did you do in that time?

KATZ: Let's see... I flew for a while, different transport missions, and I became a squadron commander for the first time in my life. Oh, let's see, let me backtrack. I had been promoted to colonel, and I came up for colonel. Understand the situation a little bit. It was actually, it was pretty much a pilots' Air Force, and pilots sat on the promotion board and when they looked at your records, they promoted—primarily they would promote pilots, and the leftovers went to the navigators and the non-rated guys. So, the first time I was overlooked for promotion, I got passed over. Then I got called in by my squadron commander, and he said, "You know, we're really sorry that you got passed over, and we were surprised," because I had all of these, you know, the situation in Vietnam and all that stuff, and he said, "you know, we can find you a job in the squadron for a year or so, and then you can retire." And I said I didn't want to do that, I wanted to stay in a squadron, and I said I would work very, very hard in the squadron so that I'd earn another promotion. And lo and behold I did. And, so I was promoted to colonel, much to my surprise. I was fortunate that two generals that knew me were on the promotion board, and that helped.

SCHNEIDER: And what year was this?

KATZ: This would be, let me see, about 1978, I would say. Yeah, I served as colonel for about eight years. About 1978.

SCHNEIDER: And where were you stationed at this time?

KATZ: I was—let me think—I was stationed in... I'm drawing a blank. But, after I was promoted, one of the generals that I was talking about requisitioned my services to go to Scott Air Force Base [IL], which was the headquarters of the Military Airlift Command, and they put me in the supply assistance division. And I knew absolutely nothing about supplies, absolutely nothing. I was a complete fish out of water; I'd been flying airplanes for 22 years. And I hated it, although I didn't tell him that.

But, I tried to go down, and about once a month I'd go down—this is in the headquarters of the Military Airlift Command—I'd do down to this personnel guy and say, you

know, "Get me out of here. Get me out of here." And one day he said, "You know, I don't really know what I can do for you." He said, "I've got one job," he said, "I've got one job. I've had five officers retire rather than accept this job." And I said, "Well, what is it?" He said, "Commander of the 374" whatever it was, "Aerial Port Squadron in the Philippines." And I said, "I can be out of here this afternoon." I was at headquarters in Illinois at Scott Air Force Base, and Pat stayed home in our house, the house that I'm in now, because we didn't want to sell the house or leave it empty and rent it out. So, she stayed here while I was in Scott and trying desperately to get out of there. And so I went to volunteer and I went to the Philippines and had an 18-month tour as a squadron commander. And we were rated as the best aerial port squadron in the Air Force the year that I was the commander, 18 months I was there, which made me feel very great.

SCHNEIDER: What year was that?

KATZ: That would be 1978, I guess.

SCHNEIDER: When you were colonel?

KATZ: Yeah, I was a colonel. And because I did them a favor by taking this job that nobody wanted, they said, "Where do you want to go?" on the way back, and I said, "Southern California." So, I was assigned to—I can't think of the name of the base now in southern California. It was too far to commute from our home here in Palos Verdes to the northern part of southern California.

SCHNEIDER: It wasn't Camp Pendleton [CA], was it?

KATZ: Oh, no, that's a Marine base.

SCHNEIDER: Okay.

KATZ: Shoot, I can't think of the name of the base now.

SCHNEIDER: No worries. So, then, what did the next eight years, post-Philippines, and from the Philippines to your retirement, what did those next eight years consist of?

KATZ: Let me think here for a minute. Well, I wasn't flying. I spent part of the time in the Philippines. And I was Deputy

Commander for Resource Management in a squadron, and then I was Inspector General for a while at Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino [CA]. And just various staff and administrative positions.

SCHNEIDER: And then you decide to retire in 1986.

KATZ: It wasn't exactly I decided to retire. My 30 years was up.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, right. So, what have you been doing in retirement since 1986?

KATZ: Job hunting. And in 1987, I found a job working for a company that shipped household goods and property around the world. If a serviceman was being stationed in the Philippines, for example, we would ship his household goods, his or her household goods to that base. It was a company called Associated Air Freight, and they've changed it to something else. I've forgotten what it is now. It's now been taken over by some other company. And I did that for 22 years, and it was a nice... Got me out of the house and brought in some money. I was in about maybe \$40,000 a year on top of my pension, so it enabled us to fix up the house pretty nicely and do some traveling.

SCHNEIDER: Have you been back to Vietnam since?

KATZ: I have not, no. I'm not sure how friendly that is anymore. But, no, I haven't. I haven't been back to the Philippines since my tour as a squadron commander. As it happens, I have a live-in caregiver, he's from the Philippines. And when I went to Clark [Air Force Base] as squadron commander, I went to night school to study the language, the Philippine language, which is Tagalog, because we had a lot of Philippine civilian employees as laborers and handling passengers. In addition to shipping freight, we handled the passengers, as well, coming in and out of the Philippines, and I had various places I was responsible for in Thailand. Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, I was shipping stuff to all those places. So, it was a good job, and I retired after 22 years with the company, and now I'm doing absolutely nothing. [laughter]

SCHNEIDER: Have you enjoyed your retirement?

KATZ: Oh, yeah. I don't do too much. Unfortunately, my wife passed away.

SCHNEIDER: I'm sorry to hear that. When did she...

KATZ: She died six years ago from a lifetime of smoking cigarettes.

SCHNEIDER: I'm sorry to hear that.

KATZ: Yeah, thank you. So I hired—I have a full-time live-in caregiver who's from the Philippines. He cooks and he takes care of me and the dogs. I have five dogs, which astonishes me. I started with one. Well, actually, we started out with two. My wife had a dog, and then when she died, we inherited that dog, and we started adding to the flock, and now we have four poodles and a little golden retriever puppy that we just got about 10 days ago. These are all dogs that nobody wanted. And I have a, did you ever see a long-haired Chihuahua?

SCHNEIDER: No.

KATZ: We have a long-haired Chihuahua. You can Google it and see what they look like. A wonderful little dog that my caregiver was visiting some people in the western part of the county and saw this little dog tied up to the garage, and he said, "What's the story with that dog?" and he said, "Oh, if you want him, you can have him." And he picked him up and brought him home to us, and he's the nicest little dog I ever had. He didn't even have a name, and I wanted to give him a name with some dignity, so I named him "Bradley."

SCHNEIDER: That's a good strong name.

KATZ: Yeah. Bradley. I don't see Bradley here, but I have one dog sleeping right under my desk as I talk, in the knee hole of my desk, a little female poodle. And I have two other poodles, and we just now within the last two weeks got a golden retriever puppy, cutest little thing you'd ever want to imagine. It's all hair. Very little dog under there, but it's gonna be big, it's gonna grow, a big dog. And she's the sweetest little thing. So, I've got five dogs, and the city only allows you to have three, so we've got to keep this kind of quiet.

SCHNEIDER: I won't tell anyone, I promise.

KATZ: [Laughter].

SCHNEIDER: All right, well, Steve, before we wrap everything up, is there anything else you wanted to discuss or talk about regarding your life or experience in Vietnam?

KATZ: I was just proud to serve and it was a great experience. I know I would have been another lousy lawyer, if I'd gone on the career path that I envisioned, and it would have not been very... I might have made more money. But, other than that, I got a really nice house, right on the ocean. I have a 180° view of Catalina Island. And life is good, except I don't have my wife anymore. But, it was her decision to smoke and I regret that, but it wasn't something that I could persuade... I quit smoking. I quit long before she died. I quit smoking, I quit drinking, and I'm reasonably healthy. I'll be 83 in another 10 days. And those were good decisions. So, you know, I'll try and hang in there as long as I can. And I'm financially secure. I've got a nice house, got a caregiver, and right now five dogs, which is unbelievable. And I tell you, when the doorbell rings and all five start barking at once, you want to hide, it's so noisy. But, you know, it's a good life and I'm happy and I've made some good investments, so we're financially secure. And have a few friends, not many, but I've lived on this block since, oh, let me go back to how we got here. My wife bought this house. Are you familiar with California at all?

SCHNEIDER: A little bit, yeah.

KATZ: You know southern California?

SCHNEIDER: A little, but continue.

KATZ: Okay, I live in the city of Rancho Palos Verdes, which is in Los Angeles County. It's on the southwestern portion of the state of California. It's right on the ocean, right opposite Catalina, and very, very nice. It's a house that when I was in Vietnam, my squadron commander tour for the last time, Pat—we were renting and Pat looked around and bought this house. It's a nice house. It's 2,100 square feet, and she paid \$56,500 for it. And my parents were actually shocked at how much the house cost, and really gave Pat a hard time about it. "You're bankrupting our son," and all that crap. And, then they came out here and they saw the house, and they decided it wasn't such a...

Oh, I pulled a dirty trick on them. Coming back from the airport, there's a little area that we call, uncharitably, "slum housing," and I turned into the first street after the turn from the airport and pulled into that, found the scuzziest looking house on the block and I pulled up in front of it and said, "Well, here we are. How do you like it?" My wife was hysterical in the back seat, she was laughing so hard. Because I didn't tell her I was going to—I didn't think of it until about halfway home. And my parents were just speechless. And I did it for about—and I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, wrong house," and drove away and then drove up to the house we have, and by then they would have loved, whatever we've got, if we were living in a garage they would have thought it was great after seeing that other place. And Pat really appreciated me doing that. It turned out well. But, it's really nice living here and I have two bookcases—I'm staring at two bookcases full of books that I've never read, and will probably never get to. But, I get to read, I get to watch television, I get to take naps, I get to play with the dogs. So it's, you know, a good life. And the Air Force was good to me, and I worked hard, and I served proudly, and reasonably successfully.

SCHNEIDER: Well, Steve, I just wanted to say thank you for your service. I have so enjoyed talking to you this afternoon. I wish you all the best, and the happiest of birthdays in 10 days.

KATZ: Thank you very much. It was a pleasure talking to you. And where are you from originally?

SCHNEIDER: New Haven, Connecticut.

KATZ: Oh, okay. So, we grew up kind of in the same area of the world.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah, in the same region, absolutely.

KATZ: Yeah, do you know Long Island at all?

SCHNEIDER: No, unfortunately, not well.

KATZ: Oh, okay. Yeah, it was a nice place to grow up. And yeah, I had a good life, and I have no regrets, other than losing my wife, and I was very fortunate to survive 30 years in the Air Force and a moderate amount of success. So, I wish you very well and... What do you plan to do when you graduate?

SCHNEIDER: I think I'm going to try my hand at law school.

KATZ: Oh, really? Okay. I wish you a lot of success with that. I'm happy that I didn't do that, although I disappointed my parents. But, I made enough money to live on, and I met my wife. If I hadn't stayed in, I wouldn't have met Pat.

SCHNEIDER: Exactly.

KATZ: I don't know anybody else that would have put up with me, so...

SCHNEIDER: All right, well, Steve, thank you so much for our chat. I will be in touch with you via email about the recording and the transcript. And until then, happy birthday.

KATZ: Thank you very much, and I wish you success. What year are you in, junior year?

SCHNEIDER: I'm a junior here, yes.

KATZ: Junior, okay. Well, I wish you success in law school and thereon.

SCHNEIDER: Thank you, sir. Have a good one.

KATZ: I'd like to see your name on the Supreme Court one of these days.

SCHNEIDER: Ha, ha. We just might. Who knows?

KATZ: All right. Well, best of luck to you and your studies. And I guess there's nobody listed on the faculty that was there when I was there. But, no, I've only been back that one time. And I have good memories of Dartmouth. I can't imagine what it would be like co-ed. It was all male when I was there.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah, it's a very different situation.

KATZ: It would have been a lot more civilized than when we were there.

SCHNEIDER: In some ways, yes, in some ways, no.

KATZ: Yeah. Okay, thanks so much for the call. If you think of anything else, give me another call, and maybe my recollections will come back.

SCHNEIDER: All right, will do. Thank you so much, Steve. Have a great one.

KATZ: My pleasure. Bye-bye. Good luck.

SCHNEIDER: Bye-bye. Thank you.

[End of Interview.]