

David E. Prewitt '61  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Vietnam Project  
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Transcribed by Karen Navarro

- RAFSON: Hello, this is Claire Rafson ('19). I'm sitting in Rauner [Special Collections] Library at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Today is Tuesday, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018, and it's around 10:30 a.m. Today I'll be speaking with Mr. David Prewitt, who's joining me by phone from his office in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. Hi David. Thank you so much for joining me today.
- PREWITT: Hi Claire. Thank you.
- RAFSON: Amazing. So, to begin this interview, I'd like to get a little bit of biographical information from you. Could you tell me when and where you were born?
- PREWITT: I was born in Philadelphia October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1939, at Presbyterian Hospital.
- RAFSON: And what were your parents' names?
- PREWITT: Richard Prewitt and Jean (J-e-a-n) Prewitt.
- RAFSON: And what did your parents do for a living?
- PREWITT: My father was a helicopter engineer.
- RAFSON: And your mother?
- PREWITT: She was a housewife, but she had graduated at Purdue [University, West Lafayette, IN] in Home Economics, so she was the best cook around.
- RAFSON: What was your favorite dish?
- PREWITT: My favorite dish? She would blanch almonds that were wonderful.
- RAFSON: And did you have any brothers or sisters?
- PREWITT: Yeah, I had one older brother, a younger sister, and then a brother seven years younger.

RAFSON: What were their names?

PREWITT: Richard was the oldest, and Paulie, now known as Mary T., was my sister, and my brother's Bill, the youngest.

RAFSON: And so, you had the significantly younger brother. How old are your other siblings?

PREWITT: My brother, Dick, he passed away a few years ago. He would be 80 now, if he was still alive. And my sister passed away a few months ago and she was 76.

RAFSON: Okay. And what was it like growing up in that family with a couple siblings?

PREWITT: It was good. My older brother always got me in trouble, but we had a lot of fun, had a great time, yeah. He taught me how to smoke and drink, everything. It was great. [laughter]

RAFSON: Do you have any particular memories from your childhood?

PREWITT: Yeah, memories were, I grew up in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. And we had like four-and-a-half acres. My dad had grown up on a farm in Kentucky, so he liked to have farm animals. We had sheep there and a goat and a pony, so it was like being on a mini-farm, but in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

RAFSON: Were you outside a lot then?

PREWITT: Yes, all the time outside. And my older brother and I, to avoid having to go to church, we'd go down to the barn and saddle up the pony and ride it over the bridge to the Swarthmore College [Swarthmore, PA] campus so we could miss church.

RAFSON: Did that work?

PREWITT: Eh, sometimes. Not all the time. [laughter]

RAFSON: Was your family particularly religious?

PREWITT: They used to go to Christian Science church. And then, one of my cousins in California, whose parents believed in Christian Science, decided not to have their daughter go to a

doctor, and she died of cancer, and then my parents realized maybe you do need doctors sometimes. So, we switched to an Episcopal church.

RAFSON: And so, just to go back, so you said your father was a helicopter engineer. How did that influence you? Was that something that he talked a lot about?

PREWITT: He graduated from Purdue University in 1929 with the first aeronautical engineering degree they had from Purdue. And so, there were no aircraft plants in Indiana or Kentucky—he grew up in Kentucky, so he came up east, and that's where most of the helicopter development was going on. And his first job was the Chance Vought [Aircraft Company] up in Hartford, Connecticut, and then he came to Philadelphia and started initially working for Pitcairn Autogyro Company, which is, the autogyro is like a predecessor to the helicopter, and later became chief engineer at Kellett Aircraft [Kellett Autogyro Corporation, Philadelphia, PA], and designed autogyros and helicopters. And one of his autogyros is in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington [DC], one of the ones he designed.

RAFSON: Oh, wow.

PREWITT: So yeah, I grew up with helicopters, yeah, definitely. And it was a big industry in Philadelphia in those days. I mean, except for Sikorsky [Aircraft] up in Stratford, Connecticut, most of the engineers are from Philadelphia, the helicopter engineers.

RAFSON: That's interesting.

PREWITT: Yeah. The guy that designed the basic system for the Bell helicopter, Arthur [M.] Young, he grew up right where I live, in Radnor, Pennsylvania, and later, towards the end of the war went up to Bell Aircraft, and convinced Larry Bell to switch to helicopters, and then Bell Aircraft took off.

RAFSON: And so, how were you in school, even starting as young as elementary school?

PREWITT: I started at Wallingford Elementary School [Wallingford, PA]. The school's still there, the building. And then my parents sent me to Episcopal Academy [Merion, PA], which is a private boys' day school. So I had to take a train in to 30

Street Station, the train out to Overbook, Pennsylvania, every day both ways. And I went there for five years. And then, for high school, my father decided I needed to go to Culver Military Academy in [Culver,] Indiana, where he had gone. So, they sent me out to Culver. And I spent four years at Culver. I didn't like it, but it was really good for me.

RAFSON: So, what was it like commuting into school at a pretty young age?

PREWITT: I thought it was all right. I mean, it seemed normal to me, but it was obviously, you know, [laughter] not so normal. But, it seemed fine to me. I'd get into—sometimes I'd take the trolley into 69<sup>th</sup> Street where the trolleys and buses go, and there was a donut shop there, so I'd always get a donut. And I packed on a few pounds, too, [laughter] in between going out to Episcopal and back and forth. Yeah, it was great.

RAFSON: And did your brother go there with you?

PREWITT: My brother went to another boys' school, Haverford School, [Haverford, PA], which is fairly close by to Episcopal. They had the same issues commuting to school. And then he later went to Culver ahead of me. Yeah, he was a year ahead of me.

RAFSON: So, what was it like moving out to Culver?

PREWITT: Culver was extreme discipline. You got up in the morning, you make your bed so you can bounce a quarter off of it literally. That's what you had to do; it had to be like a drum, see. And you spit shine your shoes. And you show up in ranks and you have inspection. And then you march to the mess hall, and you stand at attention in the mess hall until you're allowed to eat. And then you're marched out of the mess hall. Every meal that's the way it was, very disciplined. I didn't like it, but it was good for me.

RAFSON: Were you well behaved?

PREWITT: Yes and no. My sophomore year, I had a buddy who got me in a lot of trouble. We used to smoke cigarettes. If you smoked cigarettes, you'd get either detention or thrown out of school. And we'd sneak out in the bird sanctuary and smoke cigarettes. And my grades declined. And that next summer after my sophomore year, my dad by then had

started his own company building rotor blades for helicopters, and I worked for the maintenance guy, Murph. And I was grousing about school, and he said, "Kid, shape up. You're a lucky kid. Your dad can afford to send you to a good school. You shape your life up and go back." So, bingo, a light went on in my head and I turned around and started doing well, just like that, just one conversation.

RAFSON: So, it was definitely always there, you just had to tap into it.

PREWITT: Yeah, he just got me at the right time. You know, in your life someone says something to you or whatever and it changes everything. And that's what he did, Murph did that. And so I went back and got much better grades at Culver after that, yeah. I was able to get into Dartmouth because of that.

RAFSON: That's a really interesting memory. Was Murph, did he have any other significant influence on you, do you think?

PREWITT: Well, just a good guy, a good guy to work for. He was no nonsense. He realized that I was privileged, lucky to have a dad who could afford to send me to a place like that, and that I should be grateful. [laughter] And it turned me around.

RAFSON: And so, I guess, you said that obviously you didn't like the discipline, but that it was good for you. What do you think specifically was so good for you at the school?

PREWITT: Well, it forced me to think about every minute of the day and making it meaningful, because it was such a regimented life there. And sports were mandatory, so it got me involved in the sports, which I think are extremely important, and that's one reason I think that Dartmouth's very important, because of the sports program there. And it just got me focused in the right direction. But it took Murphy to get me focused.

RAFSON: And what sports did you participate in?

PREWITT: I played football in the fall, wrestling and boxing in the winter, and crew in the spring, every year... Big motor skills.

RAFSON: Definitely. And, so at this point, you know, how did you feel? So you're obviously you're in a very militaristic environment. Did you think about the future potentially doing something in the military? Was it something you were excited for?

PREWITT: I guess maybe in the back of my mind, you know, that... They even had subjects like motors, where'd you learn how to dismantle an internal combustion engine and put it back together, things like that, that were all military oriented. Most of our instructors were World War II veterans. A lot of them were badly wounded in the war. But they were there to teach the kids. It was great, yeah. So I guess, in the back—and also, it was an ROTC accredited school then. I don't think they do that anymore, the high schools. But, it ended up I had two years' credit for ROTC when I got out of Dartmouth. I didn't know it. So, when I got to Dartmouth, I was originally a Navy ROTC and they wouldn't give me any extra credit, the four years. And I wanted to be a pilot, and I talked to them, they said, "Well, if you graduate and can get your commission, then you go to flight school, you'd owe the Navy six years after flight school of duty." And I didn't like that, so I went over to the Army and they said, "Well, first off, you don't have to do the first two years, freshman or sophomore year, because you already got credit from Culver. Come in junior year," and then my senior year we got an Army ROTC flight program, which instead of going in for two years, which everyone had to do, it was three years including flight school. So you'd be on a contract, including flight school you'd do your three years, you're out. It was wonderful. I don't know if they still do that program. It's a great program.

RAFSON: Okay, so just to go back a little bit, then. So, can you take me to, so when and how did you find yourself at Dartmouth?

PREWITT: I got into Dartmouth because I was in a good demographic. There weren't many of us in those days that were born in '39 and '40, around that time, and that particular year, I think Dean [Albert I.] Dickerson, he was the Dean of Admissions, I think. Anyway, I got on the wait list at Dartmouth and Yale [University, New Haven, CT], and I had a good friend that was at Dartmouth and a good friend at Yale. My friend at Yale, he didn't care much about Yale. My friend at Dartmouth absolutely loved Dartmouth. So I decided, "Ah, I should go to Dartmouth." So I called Dean Dickerson and talked to him for half an hour. At the end of the conversation he said, "Okay, you're in. You're off the wait list. You're in." Just like that. And this was like wow! It was great, you know. Because my grades were B+, around in there. I wasn't the top of my class, but I was a good student, but nothing

amazing. But, in those days you could be a B+ student and still get in a good college. Can't do that today.

RAFSON: So you didn't apply directly to ROTC, then?

PREWITT: No, huh-uh. I didn't. When I got up there, I initially joined the Navy ROTC, because I wanted to be a Navy pilot. And then when I realized that the commitment, service commitment after high school, that kind of turned me off.

RAFSON: And so, what year exactly did you come to Dartmouth, then?

PREWITT: So I came in the fall of '57. Sputnik had just gone up. Oh, another interesting thing, just while you're talking about it. We had John [G.] Kemeny, who later became president at Dartmouth, and he taught calculus. And another professor was in the physics department, Francis Weston Sears, and he had taught at MIT. But, he really liked undergraduate teaching, so he decided to move to Dartmouth. So, I was enrolled in both of those courses, and after Sputnik went up, the two of them combined their courses, and we started doing calculations to put missiles into space. It was amazing. Amazing. [laughter] How many schools can do that? Not many. But, Dartmouth, two professors got together, combined their courses, and the kids started making calculations to put missiles in space. It was wonderful.

RAFSON: Wow, that's a really interesting—

PREWITT: My dad came up for freshman fathers' weekend. He was an engineer and he sat in one of these classes, it just blew him away. He said, "It's amazing. It's amazing." Yeah. That's what Dartmouth does. It's not so big that you have teaching assistants teaching everything, you know. You actually have the professors. It's wonderful.

RAFSON: So, why don't you, just to go back a tiny bit, tell me about what it was like coming to Dartmouth after your experience at Culver.

PREWITT: There were five of us in my class at Culver that went to Dartmouth, and each of us had problems academically, and I think the reason was, we had been used to this very, very regimented environment. I mean, in everything you did all day long it was regimented. And Dartmouth in those days, I don't know whether it is today, there's only two rules I was

aware of. One of them was you could not carry an uncovered drink across campus, and you couldn't keep women in your room after 11:00 at night. Those are the only two rules I was aware of. So, a lot of us kind of went a little crazy, you know?

But, all of us except one graduated of the five, eventually. And one of them was my roommate, [Robert F.] Bobby Moore ('61), who was at Culver with me. He grew up in Duluth, Minnesota, and shortly after he walked, he learned how to skate. And he was on the peewee national team and everything. He went to Culver. There was no ice skating at Culver then. He went through three years at Culver, didn't skate at all, went to Dartmouth and became captain of the freshman team and captain of the varsity team. He was a great ice hockey player. Yeah, wonderful.

But, Dartmouth brought out sports. We had as many people in intramural football that were captains of their high school teams and everything, I mean, really great players. So all the great players weren't just on the regular football team. A lot of them were intramural. They were wonderful. And freshman year, I can remember, football we dominated, basketball, baseball, hockey. It was amazing. This little school up in the middle of New Hampshire. It was great. And then the main intersection in Hanover where the traffic light is, there was no traffic light, but the head of the police, with all his uniform and everything, his medals, he was there directing traffic. It was great.

RAFSON: Well, so could you go through—sorry, just to make sure—so what exactly were you involved in at Dartmouth?

PREWITT: What was I involved in?

RAFSON: Uh-huh, sports.

PREWITT: I originally—I don't know if they still do it, but you used to have to take a physical test, and I, because I'm a big guy and I'm not real agile, I didn't get the score they needed. So I had to go for a sport, so I liked to row crew, because I rowed crew at Culver. And I rode crew freshman year, and then sophomore year, in the spring of the sophomore year, in the middle of winter, the ground was frozen, snow was everywhere. The coach made us run down to right below Wilder Dam, because the Connecticut River is frozen solid,



but just below the dam the water's all churned up. And they had barges down there. And we'd get in these barges and we'd row them around this stuff. And the water would splash on you and it'd freeze right on you instantly, you know. And you'd get off those boats and you'd be ice men getting off those boats. And I thought, *Eh, I don't know about this*. So that's why I went to rugby. You know, rugby was a lot looser. I switched to rugby, and that was that. [laughter] Sophomore year, yeah. It was great.

RAFSON: And what was the team like?

PREWITT: Rugby? We won, senior year we won every game except the last game. It was in late May of '61. We played Brown [University] down at Providence, and we tied them 0-0. So, I guess Brown and Dartmouth, co-champions of the Ivy League. And I still seen one of them, my opponents from Brown, I'm gonna see him in a couple of weeks down at Chester, Pennsylvania, at the Rugby 7's. I see him every year down there, yeah. It's great. So I've always stayed active. And I started playing rugby again when I was like 44 years old, for a year or two. It was great. And as you know, Dartmouth rugby is like, we're nationally ranked. And we won the National 7's two years in a row a couple of years ago. And [Madison J.] Maddie Hughes ('15), he was the captain of the 7's in the Olympics. Great rugby player.

RAFSON: Great. And then, so you joined ROTC, and you switched from Navy to Army because of the requirements. So, what was it like being a part of ROTC on campus?

PREWITT: It was great. I mean, I liked it, because it was familiar, because I'd been at Culver for four years. So, it was not unfamiliar; you put on a uniform and you go to... in those days, military science was one of the accredited courses you could take at college. I don't know if you could do that anymore, but it was, you know, you'd get regular course credit for it and so forth. And they had a sergeant there, Sergeant Brown. I think his first name was Bill Brown. And he was a World War II veteran, and he had been in the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division up in northern Italy. Got wounded pretty badly. And he was good. He was a tough guy. And later I found out, actually a few weeks ago, one of my classmates who lives out in Vail, Colorado, said that Bill Brown retired from the Army, went out to Vail, and he ran the

whole ski thing, program out at Vail, Colorado, for years. Good guy. Tough as nails.

RAFSON: And so, what was your typical day-to-day like being a student, and also part of ROTC?

PREWITT: Now, ROTC in those days before Vietnam really got cranking up was a very acceptable thing, and you could drill out at the Green or whatever, no big deal. Later, as the war got going the protests started. But in those days, we'd go to drills and it was good, you know, no problem.

RAFSON: Yeah, so this was obviously pre-escalation of Vietnam. What would you say the campus climate was like then surrounding the war?

PREWITT: People didn't know where Vietnam was, you know? It was just we had a few advisors over there and that was it. And I was actually, when I was in ROTC, I'm trying to remember, I graduated, and then where did I got to go? I elected the infantry, you know, because you're young and you're macho and everything. So, and they sent me to Fort Benning, Georgia to the infantry officer basic course. And, I'm trying to think... So I finished that. Then I went to helicopter school out at Camp Wolters, Texas. And while I was at Camp Wolters—that was a primary helicopter school—and at the end of primary helicopter school, December '62, Joannie and I got married outside of Philadelphia. And then my orders were to go to Germany and fly the border patrol, which was great, you know. We'd go over and honeymoon for a couple of years in Germany.

So, we got married December of '62, and we drove down to then it was Fort Rucker, Alabama was the advanced helicopter school, and now it's the regular helicopter school. And a month after I got to Fort Rucker they changed my orders to Vietnam. So all the guys in my class were married. They got orders to Vietnam. The bachelors were sent to Germany. That's the way the Army works. [laughter]

RAFSON: And so, would you mind—so, let's go back a little bit, and let's go into a few of those. So, you graduated in '61, and you had gotten your orders that you were going to just basic training then, or where were you going specifically?

- PREWITT: Yeah, basic officers training, at commission, but you had to go through basic officers training. It was like an eight week course, and it was at Fort Benning, Georgia.
- RAFSON: And what was that like?
- PREWITT: It wasn't that rugged. I mean, I stayed in the reserves later and went down to Fort Benning then. They ran those guys through a lot more physical stuff than we went through. They would basically put you in the back of a gooseneck truck and drive you out to some training area and you'd sit in bleachers and get a lecture and that kind of thing. So it wasn't that terribly rigorous or anything, I don't think. It wasn't like going through airborne school or something, you know.
- RAFSON: And so, how do you go from basic training to—were you always planning to be a helicopter pilot? Or how do you end up at Wolters?
- PREWITT: Well, when you sign up for the flight program, and I don't think they have it anymore, the three year deal, part of it includes flight school. And the Army basically flies helicopters. Well, they have fixed wing, too, but mainly helicopters. So I figured I'd probably be going to helicopter school. And, of course, that's what happened. They sent me to Camp Wolters, Texas, which is now, the base is now closed, but it's kind of a semi-museum. One of my classmates, [Howard P.] Chip Serrell, [Jr. ('61)], who was also in the Army flight program, he now lives down in Austin, Texas. He went by there and sent us some photographs of the old base there. They still have a few relics.
- RAFSON: And, to my understanding, Wolters was the main place that almost every person who flew a helicopter went through, correct?
- PREWITT: Yeah. In those days, that was the primary helicopter school. Now I think everything's done at Fort Rucker, Alabama. But it was primary at Wolters, and then advanced at Fort Rucker.
- RAFSON: So, at Wolters still you didn't think that you would end up going to Vietnam? Or was that something in your mind?
- PREWITT: I thought I'd probably fly in the border patrol in Germany. [laughter] I mean, towards the end of the primary, you know,

it looked like I was going to get orders for Germany. So that that was good, yeah. I was happy. [laughter] I got married.

RAFSON: Did you have any particular thoughts about Vietnam then? Were you still in favor of the war?

PREWITT: I didn't have any thoughts about Vietnam until later, when I was actually there. Then it became very apparent that we shouldn't be there, but we were there. And unfortunately, our leadership just hung onto that idea, and kept sending more troops over, including the Secretary of Defense [Robert S.] McNamara.

RAFSON: Right. So, just to finish up at Wolters, so how long were you there?

PREWITT: Wolters? I'm going to say from like, beginning of July of '62 to maybe December '62. So, yeah, like five or six months in primary helicopter school.

RAFSON: And how did that compare to the training before that you had been given?

PREWITT: Flying a helicopter's not easy. You know, once you're in flight, you're all right, but trying to hover the thing, I mean, it's basically got all of this inertia going to the rotor head over the top of you; it makes you want the aircraft to turn the opposite direction, so that's why you have the tail rotor to counterbalance that torque, so you keep it straight ahead. So it was kind of freaky to learn how to hover that, yeah, not easy. So it was more of a skill thing, you know, of controlling the helicopter. And you'd land in some little landing zone, and you'd make sure that you had clearance so you could turn the helicopter without hitting with the tail rotor some trees or whatever behind you.

RAFSON: Did you enjoy flying helicopters?

PREWITT: I loved it. It was great. I flew, between active duty, the National Guard and the reserves, I flew helicopters almost 20 years. And they were paying me to fly. It was wonderful.

RAFSON: How did your dad feel about you flying helicopters?

PREWITT: It was fine. I mean, when I was in law school down at Duke [University, Durham, NC], I was in the North Carolina

National Guard, and they had at least 23 of these little two or three passenger bubble helicopters. My dad came to visit me down there, so I took him on a flight and he loved it. Yeah, we flew all around the Durham area. It was wonderful.

RAFSON: Had he never actually been flying one before?

PREWITT: He had never been licensed to fly a helicopter, but I have in my living room a colorized photograph of a helicopter he had designed, and this was hovering, it was up in the air, the photograph, and I was there; I saw him. And he was—in those days the engineer would go up in a test hop, so there was a pilot in there, but my dad was there with his Humber hat on up in the helicopter. It was amazing, yeah. That was kind of standard in those days. The engineer would go up. In other words, they'd design it, but they'd go up in it, too, for the first test flight.

RAFSON: And so, sorry, just to keep track, how old—so you were finishing that training in '62. How old were you at that point?

PREWITT: I was about 22. Yeah. And when you're 22 years old, those are the people that fight wars, because they're the young guys that like to drive motorcycles and take chances and fly airplanes and things like that. So, it was an exciting time. Yeah, that's how you have wars. You don't fight wars with people in their mid-30s or 40s. You fight them with young people, in particular, young males.

RAFSON: Were there any particular people you met while you were in training that stick out to you still?

PREWITT: I still see my buddies. I'm going to go down—my wife and I are going down to Atlanta July 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>. The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association is having their annual convention down there. And I still see a bunch of guys I went to flight school with and went to Vietnam with. We see each other pretty regularly. It's like fraternity brothers. So, we always get together. Now, one of the guys lives in Chicago and he comes to Philadelphia. He sells mutual funds, and the parent company's here in Philadelphia, and once a year they have classes. He comes and stays with us and gives us the course. So I see him at least—probably this year twice this year. Last October, and then I'll see him in July down in Atlanta.

- RAFSON: So, we just finished your training at Wolters and you are—are you still under the impression at this point that you’re going to be in Germany?
- PREWITT: Yes. Because that’s why I got married on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, ’62. I was going to be going to Germany. *So we’re gonna have a great honeymoon in Germany.* [laughter] That was the idea. But, the Army has different plans for you.
- RAFSON: So, why don’t you tell me about how you found out and what you felt when you heard that you weren’t going to Germany.
- PREWITT: Chip Serrell, who was a Dartmouth classmate, he was down at Fort Rucker. He was like a couple of months ahead of me in the flight school, maybe a month-and-a-half. Anyway, and we’re all good friends, you know. Chip and I were in Dragon Senior Society at Dartmouth, and we were buddies from way back. So he comes over one day and he says, “I got some bad news for you guys.” “What’s that?” “Well, they just posted the list of the pilots who will be going to Vietnam.” He says, “I’m on the list, but,” he said, “you are too, Dave. You’re on the list.” [laughter] And this was, oh, probably in February, maybe early March of ’63. And then, a day later I got my orders to go to H-21 transition. That’s the flying banana with the twin rotors on it, because that’s what they were using in Vietnam then. So, they changed my orders and I was transitioning another helicopter. In Germany they were flying the H-34, which was a Sikorsky single rotor, about the same capacity as the H-21. But, they switched me to the H-21s because that was what was in Vietnam then.
- RAFSON: And is there a real difference in flying those two, or what they can do?
- PREWITT: There’s a difference. The H-34 is a single rotor, which means if you put power on the rotor system, the body of the aircraft wants to turn the opposite direction, so you’ve got to have a tail rotor. The H-21 had two rotors on top, all right? And they were counter rotating to each other, so there’s no torque problem. You put in power and you just lift straight up. In other words, the body of the aircraft doesn’t want to go one way or the other; it just goes straight up. So, today like you see the Chinook helicopters in Afghanistan, the big twin rotor ones, that was the one just after the H-21, the Chinook. And at higher altitudes they can lift more, too, because they’ve got two rotor systems. Yeah, so they’re a great

aircraft. It was designed by a Philadelphia engineer, Frank Piasecki designed the H-21. And then Vertol bought Piasecki aircraft, and they kept making them.

RAFSON: Okay, so March '63 you find out your orders.

PREWITT: Yeah.

RAFSON: And how soon after are you actually headed out to Vietnam?

PREWITT: April '62 they flew us to Vietnam. And from my flight class, four of us went to the 120<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company in Saigon, four of us went to the 118<sup>th</sup> over in Bien Hoa [Air Base]. My classmate, Chip Serrell, he'd gone like a month ahead, and he had gone up to the 119<sup>th</sup> up in Pleiku. So they kind of split us up in fours and fours together to go over, in the different units. And we were like the first replacement pilots. The original helicopter crews that come over, like in our case the 120<sup>th</sup>, actually it was called the 57<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company, and then it changed to 120<sup>th</sup> like a month or so later. But, it came from Fort Lewis, Washington with H-21s. And then we were the young replacement pilots. So most of the older pilots were warrant officers, and we were all commissioned officers and 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants.

We would get over there in country and they'd give us local orientation, so I got with a Warrant Officer Adams. And we'd go and he give the pattern and everything, at Tan Son Nhat Airport in Saigon. And so, the first mission, we'd go out and we'd fly up towards Tay Ninh City. There's a mountain there called Nui Ba Den, Black Virgin Mountain. And on top of the mountain was a Special Forces outpost. So we land on the base of the mountain, and we're taking off. We took two rounds through the driveshaft. This is my first trip out of Saigon. Yeah, they were trying to kill us over there. Unbelievable.

RAFSON: So, just a few questions. So, could you clarify one more time just exactly where you were stationed and where you arrived?

PREWITT: Okay. When I arrived, it was the 120<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company was at Tan Son Nhat Airport, which is the main airport for Saigon. It's still there today. And we were at a compound within the perimeter of the air base. But, it was a quick drive down to Saigon. You were just right on the edge of town

there. Yeah, so you'd go downtown at night and drink or whatever. It was good.

RAFSON: And so how does flying in country compare to all of your training?

PREWITT: Uh, how do I explain? The Army really trains people. I mean, they train you so much that even when you're scared, you do what you're supposed to do, because you've been trained so many times. You just kind of do it automatically. So, you know, all the flying was pretty routine, but sometimes things would happen, but you didn't panic. You just did what you were trained to do.

RAFSON: And then, what was it like arriving in Vietnam? Did you have any expectations for what it would be like?

PREWITT: Yeah, we came in on a commercial jet. I think it was World Airways. And I think World Airways still contracts with the US Government. It's like a commercial aircraft, but they contract it out for carrying troops around. And we landed at Tan Son Nhat Airport, and we offloaded with our duffel bags, and I guess someone was there at the terminal to meet us, and then they trucked me over to the 120<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company around the edge of the base there. It seemed like a normal airport. I mean, later there were some attacks on it, but not then.

RAFSON: And so, so you're based right near Saigon. Did you go there often? It sounds like you did.

PREWITT: Yeah, you'd go downtown. It was great. I had a little—Tom Watson, one of my flight classmates, he went to Vietnam the same time and he went to the 118<sup>th</sup> over at Bien Hoa. He and I bought a couple of Derringer over and under pistols. We bought a set of them; he took one and I took the other. And they had little holsters strapped on my ankle. So, we go downtown, just in case something happened, we'd have some protection, but never had to use it. I mean, once in a while there'd be a bombing in one of the bars down there, but not often. Once a month or whatever there'd be some bombing. It was good. I mean, it's the French influence on an Asian culture, so it's the first fusion food I've had, the French and Asian food. It was great, it was wonderful. Good town.



- RAFSON: Did you interact with any local Vietnamese people?
- PREWITT: Yeah. There was all the people that worked in our compound were Vietnamese. One of the ladies in our orderly room, her husband was, I think a Vietnamese, like a captain or an admiral, you know, pretty high up. Nice lady. Yeah, good people. The Vietnamese still—I went back there with my buddies about eight years ago, and the Vietnamese love us over there, despite all the war. Yeah. Weird situation.
- RAFSON: So, why don't you walk me through your first mission. And actually, before that, would you mind telling me, so what specifically were your duties as a pilot?
- PREWITT: Well, in the morning you go to the orderly room for a briefing. Usually you're at it at 5:30 in the morning. And most of the missions, routine missions, were like two helicopters that go out and resupply one of these strategic outposts. They had these little compounds all over South Vietnam where you'd go, and they had to be resupplied with either ammunition or food or whatever. And, so you go out and you do your pre-flight on the helicopter, and you crank it up, and you taxi out and take off, and we'd go out to one of these strategic hamlets. And the first helicopter would go down, because you don't go down at the same time, because sometimes there's small arms fire coming up at you. So we'd, one at a time go down, land, offload, and then the next one would come down, offload. And then about once a week, once every two weeks there'd be a combat assault, and you'd take Vietnamese troops into someplace to attack a suspected Viet Cong unit. That was the routine. So it was basically daily— you'd call Ash and Trash missions, you'd go out and resupply. Or sometimes when there was US troops out in the field, we'd take them beer, you know, cold beer, because they were out in the [laughter]—yeah, it was kind of miserable being down there in the rice paddies with no beer. So that would be a typical day.
- RAFSON: And so, you were supporting Vietnamese forces as well as US forces, then, correct?
- PREWITT: Yeah, in those days. That was the early part of the war. It was mainly Vietnamese forces and US advisors. I mean, there were some small US units there, but they were mainly there to support the Vietnamese in the early part of the war. The big buildup occurred in March of '65 when the Marines

went over to Da Nang. That was the first big infusion of US as units going in there. Before that, it was advisors, helicopter crews, that kind of thing. And then they had the big buildup. And that was after [Lyndon B.] Johnson became President. And he doubled down on a disaster.

RAFSON: So, at this point while you were in Vietnam, how did you feel about the war specifically?

PREWITT: It kind of evolved. After several months, to me it became apparent that we were involved in a civil war, that there was no phalanx of Chinese are going to come down like they did in Korea, okay? And it became obvious to people there that it was kind of a hopeless situation, I think. It was not a winnable war. I mentioned earlier, I went back about eight years ago with a bunch of guys I'd flown with, and we went—if you'd go from Saigon kind of a little northwest, Tay Ninh City is right at the border of Cambodia. Between Saigon and Tay Ninh City is a place called Cu Chi where the US I think 24<sup>th</sup> Division used to be there. Underneath the ground of the 24<sup>th</sup> Division were three levels of tunnels. The whole underground was mined with tunnels, and they had operating rooms—this was the Viet Cong—were operating on people underneath the 24<sup>th</sup> Division. That's how bad they wanted to win the war. So, our effort was miniscule. And we did a lot of bombing and stuff, but as far as the effort and what they put into it, the Vietnamese really wanted to win a lot more than we did. And they did. And they should have rightfully so... The problem was our leadership. Our leadership didn't realize. McNamara—I don't know if you've read his book.

RAFSON: Uh-huh, I did.

PREWITT: You did, okay. I think it was '65, '66 around there, he realized the same thing, that it was basically a civil war and we shouldn't be there. And he was Secretary of Defense. Instead of saying, "Hey, wait a minute, this is crazy. We gotta stop this," he took a job at the World Bank and kept his mouth shut. And between that time and the end of the war, what, we had 58,000 died? I think up to that point maybe 20-25,000 had died, so all of the rest of them died after that point, of the casualties. And here was the Secretary of Defense, the main guy, and he knew it, and he didn't do anything. He just buried his head and took the job at the World Bank. And all those people died, for nothing. Yeah.

Very tragic. And we're doing the same thing in Afghanistan today. There's not one Afghani that has the capability or interest in attacking the United States, but yet we have troops over there. But, the United States keeps making these screw-ups.

RAFSON: I guess, just to quickly go back to your time in Vietnam, so you spent about a year there, right?

PREWITT: Yes, uh-huh.

RAFSON: And during that year, so what exact months was it?

PREWITT: I went over in April of '62 and came back in like April of '63, or maybe May '63, right in that timeframe. I'm sorry. I went over in April '63, came back April '64, okay, yeah. And went to Fort Benning, Georgia again.

RAFSON: Okay. And so, during that year, were there any particularly significant events that you can point to?

PREWITT: Yeah. President Kennedy was assassinated I think in November of '63, I believe.

RAFSON: Yeah.

PREWITT: Just before that, our government lost faith in [Ngo Dinh] Diem, who was the President of South Vietnam then. And there was a coup, and we were told to stand down, so obviously the CIA knew everything about this coup and they were coordinating with the forces. Anyway, I remember the day, and the T-28s were coming in and bombing, and we were standing down. These are VNAF, Vietnamese Air Force aircraft coming in. And then, Diem was later assassinated. His brother, Nhu, was assassinated. Madame Nhu, his wife, she escaped to, she went to Paris, I think. Trying to think of other significant things.

RAFSON: So, while you're there and all of this is happening, what is the conversation? What are you feeling?

PREWITT: I'm feeling, well, you know, you're maybe 23 by then. You're a young person, you're there, you fly helicopters, you know. You do your duty. You kind of leave the big picture to the politicians. But, as time went on it became more and more apparent that the politicians had to know the same thing, you

know, that we shouldn't be there. Well, you probably saw Ken Burns' series on Vietnam?

RAFSON: Uh-huh.

PREWITT: Did you see it on PBS?

RAFSON: I did.

PREWITT: The first series tells it all, the first episode. Ho Chi Minh was our best friend during the Second World War. Our pilots would go down, he'd rescue them and get them back to our lines. The Japanese, of course, were in occupying Vietnam. And he pleaded to let Vietnam be free. But instead we cut a deal with the French so they could go back on their plantations and do the same thing again. And that's when he became a Communist then, because we supported the French, the French came back in. We had the Hanoi Hilton, which is now a museum up in Hanoi. The French used a guillotine, they were chopping off heads until 1952. I mean, they were brutal. They were terrible occupiers. They had a torture chamber in the Hanoi Hilton. They would torture these people. So, the Vietnamese hated the French and we supported the French. So, you know, the war started over again.

RAFSON: And then, did the assassination of JFK have any particular resonance while you were in Vietnam?

PREWITT: Resonance? It actually happened—I was about halfway through my tour then, November, '63, or close to half anyway. So my wife, Joannie was teaching school in Baltimore then, so we arranged to meet in Hawaii. So, what I did was I got a job as a courier taking classified documents so that I wouldn't use up my leave time. So, I got on a military aircraft and en route to Hawaii, and stopped in Kadena, Okinawa, and this Navy lieutenant was there, and he said, "Yeah, you can sack out in my place, and you get your next flight in the morning." So, in the middle of the night he comes and wakes me and says, "The President's been assassinated." And everyone who was fairly old at that time remembers exactly where they were and the circumstances when they heard about the President, because that was the first President being assassinated in my lifetime. And we had a couple of other assassinations maybe 75, 80 years before that. But, in modern times it was the first assassination. And

then, I met Joannie in Hawaii. But, I don't think it changed the war. Maybe it changed the war in the sense that Kennedy would have probably kept it a fairly low level situation, but when Johnson got in, he was gonna kick butt, you know, and send troops in, and he did.

RAFSON: And so, you finished your tour in the middle of '64-ish?

PREWITT: Yeah. It was about April or May '64. Just before I left, about two weeks before I was supposed to leave, we had a combat assault down on the [Mekong] Delta, and we were still flying the H-21s in the 120<sup>th</sup>. But 118<sup>th</sup>, they'd already switched over to Hueys. We were starting to get a few Hueys then. But mainly you're flying H-21s. So we were in a combat assault, and the 118<sup>th</sup> went into this LZ [landing zone], and they were getting a little shot at. Then the 120<sup>th</sup> came in the H-21s and we really took a lot of ground fire from our left side. And we're in the landing zone and guys are offloading, and I looked down, because we had two transmissions. One was the forward rotor system and the other was the aft rotor system. And the pressure gauge for the aft rotor system, the needle went to zero. So I figured either the line was cut by a bullet or a bullet went in the transmission and drained all of the oil. So I called on the radio. Behind me, Bob Chrisman was behind me in an H-21, and I said, "Do you see any oil come out?" And he said, "That's affirmative." So I knew I had no oil in the aft transmission. So I had a split decision here, either stay in that landing zone or pull pitch and leave. So we pulled pitch, and we flew like 20 minutes and landed. And we landed and shut down, and there was no oil in the aft transmission. I was a little concerned it might freeze up, but it didn't, so we were all right. And I was glad to be leaving in two weeks.

RAFSON: Did you have any other similar experiences? Was flying the combat assault generally the most dangerous part of your job then?

PREWITT: Yeah, it was. Yeah, because you have the gunships, well, usually T-28s come in, they drop a few bombs, and then the gunships come in. And the enemy's riled up then, and they're firing back. So, yeah. You're getting shot at. But, when you're 22, 23 years old, you think you're bullet proof. I think of a quote from Winston Churchill. He said, "The most exhilarating experience in life is to be shot at but not be hit." That's true. But the main thing is not be hit.

RAFSON: Okay, and so, you had this close experience two weeks before you left. And then your tour ended.

PREWITT: Yep. Then I went to Fort Benning, Georgia.

RAFSON: Back to Fort Benning, Georgia.

PREWITT: Transferred to Fort Benning, Georgia, assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division. The 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division became the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav [Cavalry] Division about a year later. So, I'm there, let's see, May of '64. July 1<sup>st</sup> '65 they're renamed the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav, and they went over, yeah, the whole division. It was the first helicopter division.

RAFSON: And how long were you in the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault?

PREWITT: My three year obligation was up in March of '65, but my wife, Joannie was teaching school at Fort Benning, so I put in paperwork to extend for three months, so it would be mid-June of '65. And it was like June 15<sup>th</sup>. That morning I put in paperwork to extend another three months, because I didn't know I was going to go to law school in the fall. I needed work during the summer, you know, to get paid. So I put in my paperwork on the sergeant's desk that morning, and that evening there was a promotion party. Don Rizzato, who happens to be a doctor in this area now—he's retired—was getting promoted from captain to major, and this party was his promotion party.

So we're at the party and everyone's drinking and everything, and Joannie, my wife's there, and she said, "Dave, I want you to talk to George Seneff." And George [P.] Seneff was then a colonel, later became a two-star general. And George, he'd been drinking a fair amount, and he said, "We're gonna freeze all the pilots July 1<sup>st</sup>." So, I'd just put in my paperwork that morning to extend for three months, okay. "We gonna freeze all the pilots July 1<sup>st</sup>, and they're all going to Vietnam." So, I didn't sleep that night, and about 4:30 in the morning I got up and I went in to this orderly room and I pulled my papers off the desk. And I was out of the Army that day because that was the last day I was supposed to be in the Army, you know. I was supposed to get out March '65. I extended for three months, and that was the end of my three months. So I was out of the Army then. And in November of '65, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav was over there, and they got

in one of the worst battles of the war. That was *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*. I don't know if you saw the movie, but with Mel Gibson and everything. There were two helicopter pilots who got Congressional Medals of Honor in that battle.

RAFSON: Which battle was this?

PREWITT: In a Drong Valley. It was *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*. There was two battalions involved. One of them was Hal Moore's battalion. He got chewed up pretty badly, but they got out there. The next battalion came in after the disengagements in the battle, and I don't know why, but rather than picking the next battalion up by helicopters, they had them do a road march through the jungle. They didn't put in any pointer security guards, and they got in an ambush and it practically wiped out the whole battalion. It was a total disaster. It was one of the worst battles in the whole war. It was a slaughter. And actually, when I was in the reserves, Joe Marm was our active duty advisor, Colonel [Walter Joseph] Marm, [Jr.] and he had gotten injured and he got a Congressional Medal of Honor in that battle under Hal Moore's unit. Yeah, that was bad.

RAFSON: And so, yeah, so what was the feeling—so you would not have gone back to Vietnam?

PREWITT: I didn't want to go back there. [laughter] I was thinking about going to Canada or something, you know. I didn't want to go back there again. I knew it was a hopeless situation. The war was a disaster. But, we had a President, he just wanted to send in more troops. And he doubled down on it. It's this mentality of the Second World War, you know, "We're mighty and we can defeat anyone." And it doesn't happen always that way. Just because you—I think we dropped more tons of bombs in Vietnam than we dropped at all of Europe during the Second World War, and actually more tons of bombs around Khe Sanh, the perimeter of Khe Sanh, than in the entire Western Europe during the whole Second World War. And just made a lot of pock holes in the ground.

RAFSON: And so, so you decided not to go, obviously. And what did you do next?

PREWITT: Then I got out of the Army in June of '65, and we went up to Lexington, Kentucky, and I enrolled in the University of

Kentucky Law School, and Joannie got a job teaching there. And I joined the Kentucky National Guard, because they used to have—I don't know if they still do—they used to have a six year obligation total when you take a commission. So I'd already done a little over three years, but I still had two-and-a-half or whatever more years. So, you had to be in some kind of unit. So I was in the Kentucky National Guard, and I did that for a year, and then I transferred to Duke Law School, and the GI Bill paid for the law school, and I joined the North Carolina National Guard. And stayed down there two years. And my most proudest mission of flying a helicopter was we were at summer camp down at Fort Bragg in the western side of the reservation where the drop zones are, and I had a little H-23 helicopter, a three-person helicopter. It was one of the earliest models. And I flew in one of these drop zones, and I had to pick up these two big, heavy, fat chaplains, one on each side of me. And I couldn't hover the helicopter. But it was sandy soil, and a little bit of a breeze, so I started moving forward through the sand and got enough speed up so I got a little lift, and then we took off. And I flew these guys [laughter] and landed. It was amazing. They don't know how close they were. [laughter]

RAFSON: Is that what your typical work in the National Guard was?

PREWITT: Yeah, that kind of thing, yeah. And then, I'm trying to think... My senior year, this is April '68 when Martin Luther King was assassinated, they called up the Guard because they were actually burning warehouses in Durham. I mean, it was a pretty tumultuous time. And they sent me down to Wilmington, North Carolina. I was flying at nighttime, and I took a round in the helicopter. [laughter] And I was flying at nighttime over Wilmington. Yeah, so... This is in the US.

RAFSON: Was the assassination of MLK and being actually in the United States, did that have any different impact than that of JFK?

PREWITT: Well, it had an impact on us because we lived in a little house in the pine woods on the north side of Durham, and the guy that owned the little thing of houses right there was a guy named George Birmingham. And his other job was, he was president of the Ku Klux Klan in Durham County, okay? So, we got called up when Martin Luther King was killed, and I said, "Joannie, you've got to get out of this house. You never know what's gonna happen." And fortunately a friend



of ours, Dr. Royster—he's in Philadelphia—he had moved to the north side of Durham in one of these gated communities. So I took her up there to get her out of the house, because you didn't know what was going to happen. And North Carolina was pretty turbulent there for several weeks, and then it kind of died down. But, yeah...

RAFSON: What did you think could have happened?

PREWITT: What could have happened? I mean, you don't know what people are going to do when they're stirred up and they're violent and they're burning warehouses down in North Carolina. You don't know if someone who knew about George Birmingham would want to do to his neighborhood, you know. You don't know what's going to happen. People do crazy things. Yeah, that was a turbulent time.

[Both talk at the same time.]

RAFSON: And do think that mirrored... Go on.

PREWITT: No, just, you think back on those times, with all this assassination and everything, a lot of stuff was going on then. People, you kind of forget about it, but a lot of things were happening, you know, because Martin Luther King was the second major assassination, and then Bobby Kennedy. I mean, a lot of... I mean, it was bad news.

RAFSON: And was this something that on a day-to-day basis felt present in the climate of the country?

PREWITT: The climate of the country then was pretty bad. I can remember—I'm trying to think where we were—after that, several years after that... I first, after I got out of law school, I went to work for the Department of Justice in Washington. I worked there for about a year or so. And then I worked for a law firm in Jacksonville, Florida, and this is in 1971. We're leaving Jacksonville, Florida, and they're still—and we had our housekeeper with us, a black lady, and we're driving up through Georgia and there's still "Colored," "White only," "Colored only," I mean, these segregation signs were still there in '71.

And actually, when I was at Fort Benning, I'm thinking about it, 1964, summer of '64, I'm with the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division at Fort Benning, and there was this [Lieutenant] Colonel

Lemuel [A.] Penn, he was a black lieutenant colonel, decorated guy from World War II, and he was the principal of a high school in Washington, DC, and he came down to Fort Benning for his two week duty. In those days when you were in the reserves, or even National Guard, you did two week active duty and then you do reserve things near where you live. He came down for his two week active duty, and he left Fort Benning driving back up to Washington. He's in Macon, Georgia, a beautiful day, his uniform's hanging up behind him in the car, a pickup truck pulls up beside him and they blow him away with a shotgun. They didn't know him. They just blew him away. The jury down in Georgia—this is 1964—acquitted the murderers. I mean, they had them cold turkey and they acquitted them. And it was only because of the civil rights legislation, the feds then went after these guys and they convicted them and sent them to prison. But the local juries let them off for murder. I mean, out and out murder. They didn't even know this guy. Just blew him away. And unfortunately, our country hasn't moved a whole lot beyond that. I mean, somewhat, but not a whole lot.

RAFSON: And, so how did you—I might have missed it—how did you find yourself—did you always plan to go to law school, or was that just something...

PREWITT: I decided to go to law school because I had to do something, and it was, in those days it was fairly easy to go to law school. I mean, not today. You've got to be at the top of your class and everything else. But then, it was... And I did well. The first year of law school I got on Law Review and the top 10% of our class. So, getting into Duke, I got in. But, I couldn't do that today, you know. Much more difficult. It was much easier in my generation, yeah, much easier. And the GI Bill picked up the whole tab, so I had no debt out of law school. And these kids nowadays, half of them can't get jobs out of law school and they have \$150,000 in debt, and that's terrible. But then, everyone had a job. Well, until 1967, no young lawyer in the country made more than \$10,000 a year. But everyone got employed. And [Inaudible] in 1967 went above \$10,000 in New York. So, I'm lucky. I went through the best time in the law business.

RAFSON: And then you ended up at the DOJ right after you graduated?

PREWITT: Yeah, DOJ. There was an aviation unit in the Department of Justice. And a friend of mine who went to the University of North Carolina Law School, Chapel Hill, he was in the National Guard with me in North Carolina, and he got a job—he was a year ahead of me—up at DOJ in the aviation unit. So I decided, you know, that'd be great, and try that. And we moved to DC, and we'd go mainly on depositions and things. But, they'd send me out to like the state of Oregon and I'd be there for two weeks or three weeks in depositions, and it kind of got wearing on the family life pretty quick. So I did that for about a year. And then, some of my Duke classmates were in this law firm in Jacksonville, and I decided to join that firm, just because the family life was too stressed on this being away on the road all the time.

RAFSON: Right. And, so the aviation unit, was that particularly interesting to you after having served? Or just in your wheelhouse?

PREWITT: Aviation law, you mean? Or...

RAFSON: Yes.

PREWITT: Yeah, it was, because that was flying... I kept flying even after I finished up in the Army reserves, I had like 19, 20 years flying helicopters. And I stayed in and became a JAG [Judge Advocate General] officer by then. And I then, you know, my wife said, "You really like flying, don't you?" And this was like a year had gone by and I hadn't flown. And so she talked me into buying into an airplane, so I bought into an airplane, and I kept flying. And I flew as many hours in a fixed wing as I did in a helicopter. I flew like 4,000 hours altogether: 2,000 in helicopters, 2,000 in airplanes. It was great.

RAFSON: How does flying an airplane, in a fixed wing, compare to flying a helicopter?

PREWITT: It's much easier. You don't have the torque problems, yeah. When you're trying to hover in a helicopter, you've got to counterbalance the torque with your pedals and your feet. That changes the pitch on the tail rotor, to keep it straight. But, in the air they're very similar. I can remember one time, this may be 15 years ago, I had a Cherokee 6 then, it was like a six-passenger single engine aircraft, and we're flying up from the Bahamas, Florida, and we're coming up the East

Coast, and there was an Army helicopter that was—it was a very clear day, and they were about a couple thousand feet below me, and we're going about the same speed, you know, all the way up, about 140 knots, yeah. So, once you're in forward flight, they're very similar. It's just that when you come to a hover, then you've got your hands full. But, flying a helicopter's a lot of fun.

RAFSON: Do you prefer it?

PREWITT: I do, yeah. I love flying helicopters. They're wonderful machines.

RAFSON: You haven't flown in quite some time, though?

PREWITT: Beg your pardon?

RAFSON: You haven't flown either in quite some time? Or are you still flying, casually?

PREWITT: I'm not flying casually because about three years ago, my wife, Joannie and I were out to dinner, and I woke up at Bryn Mawr Hospital. I'd had a stroke, but I recovered all right.

RAFSON: Wow.

PREWITT: But I didn't want to be in an aircraft and blank out. That wouldn't work out too well. So, that was the end of my flying. But I got like 52 years of flying, so I'm happy.

RAFSON: Wow.

PREWITT: Yeah. We used to, when we had the Cherokee 6, two of my daughters went to Brown University up in Providence, and we could... the driving, if it weren't for New York City, you could drive up there fairly quickly, but because of New York, all that congestion. We'd get in the airplane, in an hour and 40 minutes we could fly right over New York, land up at T.F. Green Airport, go and have lunch with them, do a round in the afternoon, get back in the airplane and fly home for dinner. It's like a magic carpet. You don't have to be that fast. You just hop over things. Yeah, it's wonderful. And we used to fly up to Hanover a lot.

RAFSON: Oh, that'd be great.

PREWITT: Oh, yeah. One time we were up in Hanover, and I was running mini-reunions for my class, and we're in one of the rooms there at Hopkins Center. Anyway, but we had booze, you know, so I packed the booze up. And it was nighttime. It was in October, a really warm night. So we go down to Lebanon Airport, we load up, then we take off, we're flying south, and just north of Allentown is Blue Mountain, and we're right over the top of Blue Mountain, a really clear night, and I listen to weather things and they said, "There's a fog moving in from the south, and Baltimore Airport's closed down already. It's coming up north." And so I figured, well, our airport's [inaudible] valley, it's a little uncontrolled airport, and I thought we'd better not go in there. Let's go into Philadelphia International. So we're over the top of Blue Mountain, and all of a sudden our alternator goes out. Now, the engine still runs because you have magnitos to keep the engine spark plugs working. But, all your avionics, your radios, all those things, are controlled now by the battery. There's nothing recharging the battery. So I have to get into Philadelphia International. And here we're loaded with booze, too. So, we shoot an [inaudible] approach. There's zero-zero conditions right down the runway in Philadelphia International. And the fog really moves in, so they have to send a chase truck out there. I thought [inaudible] to get in. It was unbelievable. [laughter] But, yeah, things happen.

RAFSON: You can only imagine that your training in your past kept you calm during that.

PREWITT: It did. You're right, yeah. You're right.

RAFSON: And so, just a few more biographical questions. So you have two daughters now?

PREWITT: I have three. My oldest daughter, she went to Ohio Wesleyan [University, Delaware, OH], and then Villanova [University, PA]. The twins went to Brown. And they went to Dartmouth and they were rejected by Dartmouth and accepted at Brown, and Title IX I think is the women's sports—or is it Title IX? I think it is.

RAFSON: Uh-huh.

PREWITT: You know, it was already in place. And so, the Brown women's crew had as much funding as the men's crew. So they had a husband and wife, Murphys, who, the wife ran the

freshman women's and the husband ran the varsity women's. And my daughters are both 6'1", and they were the engine of the "Brown 8." And they rode in the Nationals. It was great, yeah.

RAFSON: Wow.

PREWITT: They have a great program at Brown. And it turned out it was the right place for them at the time. And they're now 47 years old now.

RAFSON: And you still, it sounds, you're still very involved or somewhat involved in your Dartmouth class?

PREWITT: Yeah. Last weekend we ran a mini-reunion up at Newport [RI] for my class. It was great. Newport is a great location. We stayed out on—do you know Newport at all?

RAFSON: A little.

PREWITT: There's an island right in the middle of the harbor, Goat Island. It used to be, the Navy during the First and Second World Wars, a torpedo factory on the whole island. They employed several thousand people there making torpedoes. But, then the government abandoned that, and then it became a resort, a Hyatt resort. And we signed up for the mini-reunion. It was a Hyatt resort, and then it became a Gurney resort. And we got a great rate of \$199 a night for the rooms. Now the rooms are \$700 a night there. But, they kept to their old contract, and we had a blast. A sailing ship came out to the Gurney, and we loaded right there at the Gurney and went out for a sail and it was wonderful. Good time. And we had—I was a Phi Delt [Phi Delta Alpha] at Dartmouth—and six of my fraternity brothers and their spouses showed up, and it was great.

RAFSON: And so, is there anything in particular about your experience and about Dartmouth that kept you, that keeps you so plugged in?

PREWITT: I think where Dartmouth really has it is its isolation, you know. If I go into Penn, I've been right in the city, you know, or even Princeton, somewhat of a city. But Hanover, and this was before the interstates came in, was really isolated. And so, you have fun on the weekends. You would get together with your fraternity brothers or friends and do stuff, you

know. We used to have it in the backyard of the Phi Delt house, we had an all Phi Snow Bowl. We'd get a keg of beer going in the morning and we would have tackle football. But, no one got hurt because it was slushy snow. And you just got to be very close to your friends. It was wonderful. And Dartmouth's a great place. And the sports there are just wonderful. Yeah, I loved Dartmouth. And my wife, Joannie, we were dating then, and she'd come up, she'd follow the rugby team around, and she'd tape up people's pants and bring them oranges, and it was great. Dartmouth was a great experience. And I understand ROTC is now back again, right?

RAFSON: My understanding is that it's back, but technically not through the college at this moment.

PREWITT: Okay, yeah.

RAFSON: But, I've known a few ROTC students. How do you feel about ROTC now as a program?

PREWITT: I think it's important. I think it's important to have citizen soldiers keeping the military honest. And I think, if I look back on it, I was fortunate there was a draft then, because if there hadn't been a draft, I might have decided not to do it. But it was the best experience of my life going in the military, active duty and everything. And I think some kind of service for your country, whether it's military or teaching or something, like a two-year thing would be wonderful. I don't know if we'd ever get it in this country, but it'd be a great thing. You know, the Americorps or all these things, they're all great. They're good programs. Now, the Peace Corps, I have friends that they still get together with their old Peace Corps buddies. They're my age, you know. And it was wonderful. They have reunions and it's great.

RAFSON: So, before we get into some concluding areas, is there anything you think that we might not have been able to cover or that you'd like to add about your experiences?

PREWITT: I now run a veterans group locally.

RAFSON: Oh, I'd love to hear about that.

PREWITT: We belong to a senior center, Surrey Senior Services, and it's actually started by a mother of—let's see, when our

daughters, the twins, were in middle school, they had a classmate, Jeanne LaRouche, and her mother, Jean, started Surrey Services [for Seniors]. She started it out of her home in North Wayne, and it was basically getting seniors to help other seniors, take them meals, take them to the doctor, visit them at home, you know, so they could stay in their home and to have people come and see them. And now—and Jean died about a year, year-and-a-half ago—and now they have four facilities, and we go to the one in Devon, [PA], which is a brand new two-story building with a gym in it and classrooms and everything. And about a year-and-a-half ago, I knew that Jean LaRouche had started this; I didn't realize that they had these facilities, and my wife, Joannie, said, "You ought to check this place out in Devon. It's wonderful. They got a gym there," and I've always gone to gyms all my life. So, I ended up joining the gym. And it's a great gym.

And the president, Bob Madonna, he said, "You know," he said, "the women are used to coming and participating in the program." He said, "The men don't do it so much. They're used to go to the office and they don't participate." And Joannie said, "Start a veterans group." So we started a veterans group. And I think the first thing we had was a dinner on November 11<sup>th</sup>, Veterans Day, and then every month we have meetings. I bring people into the VA to talk to them, and some of them are war story things, and all different things, and it's been great. And I was amazed how many veterans who, even the ones that stayed in like I did, you know, retired in the military for the reserves or National Guard, they weren't aware of what programs were available to them.

So, like Joannie and I, because I retired in the military, we can fly, if space available, on any military or charter military aircraft anywhere in the world. So, one of my twins lives in Paris. We go down to Baltimore, we get on a commercial jet and we fly to Ramstein Air Force Base [Germany] and take the train into Paris. It's wonderful. So we've done a lot of those trips. We've gone to Aviano Air Force Base, which is near Venice, and we've gone to Venice, and then we've taken a commercial plane in the Venice airport over to Croatia, and done Croatia down there, and then back to Aviano and home. Yeah, it's wonderful.



RAFSON: And, how's the veterans group, has it helped change or influence any of your feelings about the war or about your experience even?

RAFSON: That's interesting. Yeah, because we have various people come, some of our members come, and they give their own story. One of the guys is a supervisor in the township right next to where the Surrey Center is, and he's a Vietnam veteran. He's going to speak to us in October. In September, there's a guy, Bill Ehrhart, and he is a schoolteacher at Haverford School, a boys school. My brothers both went there. He was in the Battle of Hue. He was a Marine in the Battle of Hue. And the Battle of Hue was the most decisive battle in Vietnam, because that was during Tet [Offensive], and after that bloody battle at Hue, the American public got turned off from the war. And although the war kept on going for another year or so, that was really the end of the war, once the public lost faith in it. And Bill Ehrhart's going to speak to us. He's totally—even though he's a Marine in the Battle of Hue, street fighting and everything, he is totally against the militarization of the United States. And I kind of agree with him.

We spend more money on the military, the United States, than the entire rest of the world combined. And it's not spent very well. I think 10 years ago, in Afghanistan, to keep one uniform soldier in Afghanistan cost the US taxpayers a million dollars a year. They took the number of soldiers there, uniformed people, and the amount spent, and divided it in there, and that was a million bucks per soldier. That's about a million, two hundred, or a million, three. And there's no one in Afghanistan that's going to attack the United States, has any interest of the United States. I mean, I don't know what we're doing there. It's crazy. We're not going to change their society, no way.

And unfortunately, in Iraq, George [H.W.] Bush, Sr., had the wisdom—he could have walked into Baghdad and arrested Saddam Hussein—but he didn't, because he knew they needed a dictator there to keep those guys from killing each other. His son goes in—I don't know if you read George Bush, Sr.'s book? It was published about six months ago. In the last chapter he blasts [Vice-President Dick] Cheney and [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld for talking his son into going into Iraq, because it upset the whole balance in the Middle East. Now the Sunnis and Shiites are killing each

other. And all the refugee crisis in Europe is all caused by that. I mean, yeah, George Bush, Sr. was a very bright guy. He literally could have himself walked into Baghdad and arrested Saddam Hussein. That's how defeated the Iraqi Army was. But he was smart enough to realize they needed a dictator there. That's my feeling anyway. [laughter]

RAFSON: I guess, on that note, do you see or feel any particular parallels that you saw from the Vietnam War and from being young at that particular moment to now?

PREWITT: Yeah, I think that our leadership keeps screwing up. Vietnam was a total screw-up. And when the leadership realized it had screwed up, they didn't do anything about it. Iraq was a total screw-up. We had one President, George Bush, Sr., who knew you don't want to go in and arrest Saddam Hussein. You want to keep a dictator in charge there. But, his son was persuaded by Cheney and Rumsfeld to go in there. Afghanistan, there's probably a time right after 9/11, within a month or so, when the Al Qaeda was in Afghanistan, you want to go in there and clean them out. But after that, there's no reason to be in Afghanistan.

In two different times, two different British armies were totally destroyed in Afghanistan. Now, one of them, they captured a couple of the British soldiers and they massacred the rest of them and let the two get out of there. You don't mess around with Afghanistan. Those people are tribal, they're going to stay that way until the end of time. I mean, you're not going to change anything about it. No way. But, we keep blundering into these things, one after another. And we think we're going to democratize people? No way. I mean, it ain't gonna happen.

I mean, in the United States, back before our Revolution, the main cultural force was England, Britain. And even though they had a monarchy there, they still had a Parliament, and they had voting and the rudiments of a participating government, you know, so that people in the United States, that's how we drafted our Constitution— it's based on the British model, all right? The French had a revolution, they had none of that background. They went through three revolutions in France, because there was no concept in France of a democracy, where in English society there was. So they went through three revolutions in France. We're over

there a lot because my daughter lives there, and it's a wonderful country. But yeah, it was bloody.

I had my daughter's father-in-law, he's my age, and he is a Frenchman, and he lived through the war there. And he speaks only French. I speak only English. But, eh, five years ago we were on a picnic there in Paris and he says, "Come on with me." He takes me to Marquis de Lafayette's graveyard. It's behind a Carmelite church in a little unknown section of Paris. And Marquis de Lafayette was one of General Washington's main generals. I mean, he was an amazing guy. And he became a US citizen after the war. So he's a French citizen and a US citizen. And they have this beautiful graveyard. And right next to it is a mass grave of Carmelite nuns, and the reason they're in that grave is because when they had one of these beheadings in France, they refused to pledge allegiance to the Emperor above God. So they beheaded all of them and put them in a mass grave, yeah. That's how brutal it was. We didn't have any of that. We had a war with the British soldiers, but none of this mass executions and chopping off heads, and yeah, it was brutal. So, I get hot under the collar on this. [laughter]

People talk about the Tet and the Battle of Hue, and to me, in our Revolution, the Battle of Yorktown was very similar. And the French, half the troops at Yorktown were French, and the French Navy blocked the British Navy from coming in to resupply Cornwallis. And we won that battle. And that's when the English public got turned off to the Revolutionary War in the US. And the war went on another year or so, but that was the end. That battle finished it, just like Hue finished the Vietnam War. Once the public is turned off, that's going to be the end.

RAFSON: And then, I guess my last question is for you personally looking back on your experience in ROTC and also actually serving in Vietnam, what lasting impacts or impression has it made on you?

PREWITT: The Vietnam War. Wow, what lasting impression? The most lasting impression is probably how our leadership has so much power they can unleash, and how ignorant they are of what's going on. I mean, they do a knee jerk thing. You send troops in, that's the easy part. You know, recently they criticized the Veterans Administration for backlogs? Well, Congress started these wars. They didn't give any more

money to the VA. The VA is still under the sequester. So they couldn't hire any more physicians or nurses there. So the VA started trying to handle all of these things. And it never came out when they blasted the VA that the root problem was that our Congress didn't give any more money to the VA. So it's real easy to start a war, but you got to look at the consequences of what happens to it. And the leadership has never done that. That's why we need more women in Congress. You know, half our law students and half our medical students are female? In Congress and our state legislature in Harrisburg, less than 20% are female. We need half female. We'd be in many fewer wars, I think. And I think that people would talk more before they'd go into wars.

Yeah, the only war in my lifetime that probably had to be fought was the Second World War. However, because after the First World War we put such reparations on the Germans, it bankrupted their government, and their unemployment was over 50%. And Hitler comes along and said, "I'm gonna save you." And he saved them because he started a war and employed everyone making munitions. So the Second World War didn't even have to occur except what we did after the First World War. So there's always consequences to everything.

So I think the main thing is the leadership has to look at what's really going on, and not do this knee jerk stuff. And I think a lot of it was, if you go back, McCarthy hearings. You know Senator [Joe] McCarthy from Wisconsin, was he? Anyway, all this Red Scare in the United States, and whipped everyone up about the Reds, and "the Reds are gonna do this and that." And then they got this idea about the domino theory of Communism, and it got everybody whipped up. And the leadership, instead of taking a clear eyed view of what's going on, they just buy into it, and you have a mess. Yeah.

So, if I was President, I would pull out of Afghanistan yesterday. I'd pull out of it two years ago. I mean, this is ridiculous. Those people aren't going to do anything to us. They're not going to kill anyone here. Leave them alone. And if someone in Afghanistan feels that they're being subjugated, well, then let them come to the United States, you know. I'm all for immigration into the United States. That's what kept this country going. That's how my ancestors came here. That's how your ancestors came here.

RAFSON: Yep. Definitely interesting.

PREWITT: It is. But, you're a history major?

RAFSON: I am.

PREWITT: Yeah, good. It's a great thing to learn history. But, really read history and realize what's going on, because human beings have this innate ability to keep redoing what they did before. Human nature never changes, never changes. So, you can predict what's going to happen under certain circumstances by studying human nature and what they've done in the past. So, where are you from, Claire?

RAFSON: I'm from Chicago. Well, so, why don't we wrap this up and then I'm happy to chat for a bit.

PREWITT: Okay. All right.

RAFSON: So, is there anything else you'd want to add in or that you think we should get to?

PREWITT: I can't think of anything off the top of my head, no.

RAFSON: Yeah, I personally feel like I've covered everything that I was hoping to get to.

PREWITT: You're a good interviewer.

RAFSON: [laughter] Thank you so much. I'm going to stop the recording now. Thank you, again. I'm not going to hang up, though. So, thank you again for joining me.

[End of Interview.]