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Interview with Harvey Mayhill

Harvey Mayhill

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EC: I am Emily Cranwell, I am the A/V archivist at the Louise Pettus Archives at Winthrop University. I am Interviewing Harvey Mayhill today at the archives. Today is November 29th, 2017, so we can go ahead and get started. So just go ahead and introduce yourself and then we can get to the good stuff.

HM: Thank you, occasionally I might [voice shaken] cough because I have a little cold. [Coughs] As Emily said my name is Harvey Mayhill and I was born in Davenport, Iowa on January 12th, 1943. I was born into a family that was extremely in poverty. I lived in a place called Skidrow with 22 taverns within a two block radius of my home. I’ve seen things that most adults would never see in their life before they even went to school. I’ve seen the act of prostitution murders; you name it I’ve seen it. Being Davenport, Iowa a river town, not too far from Chicago, I had a lot of the al Capone influence there. As I went through school, I had a lot of difficulty with school; it was not challenging enough to me. When I was seven years old, my father passed away and my mother remarried when I was 11. During that time when she was
working and I was alone by myself on the streets, I was selling newspapers, going into taverns selling papers. By the time I was 12 years old, I had almost $500 in savings which would equate to around $7,000 today. That was a pretty good chunk of change for a young kid living in poverty. I would occasionally buy groceries for my mom and I because she could not afford at 35 cents an hour; and here I was selling newspapers, in an hour I would make three or four dollars. It was a hustling work. So with that background it kind of led me to some of what I have experienced throughout the years. My stepfather got us out of that area and into a modest home on the out skirts of town and he had served in the United States Army Air Corps, the forerunner to the United States Air Force. I thought that was kind of cool and we didn’t totally agree on everything but we didn’t disagree on everything either. We did have some clashes because; [voice shaken] I was a young fella that had been kind of on my own for four or five years and he’s stepping in trying to be a father. But I did learn a lot about military from him and I appreciated that.

In my senior year of high school I was entertaining the idea of going into the military because it was a direction of learning something and getting a start in life. We didn’t have enough money for college education and I goofed off so much in school that I wouldn’t qualify for college anyways. So I had been talking to the Marine recruiter and the Air Force recruiter and there was a fella one year head of me in school that had gone to the Marines and he was a really rough and tough guy. He came back and told me how tough basic training was at boot camp and I thought that if he had a tough time that I would never make it. So I started looking at the Air Force a little bit more; and when I was about 10 years old, I had seen a movie with Jimmy Stewart in it, an old time actor, called Strategic Air Command. It was all about Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska, and these B52 bombers. I was very intrigued by the movie and I thought the Air Force seems pretty neat and pretty cool. So I decided in 1961 that after high school I was going to go to the Air Force. I failed short two credits from graduation because again I was goofing around a lot. Again, school didn’t challenge me enough and it was pretty much boring. I could have done the grades, could have done very well, I was just a hard headed young kid that didn’t know any different. So I was root been working at an A&W stand for three years. I was the student manager, the owner was the adult manager and I worked through the summer. Went back to the school to go and get my two credits from high school, graduate then go on to the Air Force. Well it was a big change, curriculum change; I need six additional credits. So I said let’s just double up, I’ll come in early to early class, stay late, they said well those other credits won’t be offered until next semester. I said forget it, went down to the Air Force recruiter and said I am ready to go right now. No high school diploma, that’s a problem. He said if you’ll finish your high school in the air force, we will take you, and I said no problem. So they had set me up for the longest school branch the military had except for the academy. I had scored very very high in all the testing, so high that that I might still hold some of the records. Anyway that schools Air traffic control radar maintenance, which was 46 weeks long, six hours a day plus homework, plus your military duties. Plus I finished high school in the Air Force by going through that school at the same time. So let’s back up a little bit, and go to the day that I got to Lacklind Air Force Base, in San Antonio, Texas. It was about three o’clock in the morning. The bus rolled in and the drill instructor who got on the bus, if you stood up he pushed you down. If you were sitting down, he pulled you up. No matter what you did, you were wrong. He had us outside and he proceeded to tell us how dissatisfied he was with us getting him up at three o’clock in the morning. Also that the Air Force had a shortage of instructors for basic
training and that they have been recruiting people from the Marine Corps. So guess what I got, I got a Marine Corps DI. [Drill Instructor]

EC: [Sigh] Oh no, which is why you got into the air force. [Laughter]

HM: Yes, but the nice thing about it is, with the discipline that he instilled in us and the requirements, we didn’t march to the mess hall for breakfast. We double timed it, which means we ran. We were the first ones in the line; we always had hot food; everybody else, we don’t know what they had. We don’t care what they had. We know what we had. Excuse me [cough]. I had just a diff – a little difficult time with some of the adjusting. He called me out to the office one day, and he just ripped me up one side and down the other and some names I had never heard of before. I said, “sir may I speak open and freely sir,” he said, “yes.” I said, “Sir, you may go straight to hell, do not pass go, do not collect $200, sir.” See I still had some cockiness from my younger days. Well that didn’t sit very well with him. He didn’t ask me to leave his office, he actually threw me out. He was getting ready to kick me out of Air Force, and that’s why I told him that. I had no place to go, and if you have seen the movie An Officer and a Gentleman?

EC: I have not.

HM: Take a look at it sometime. It’s almost an exact copy of what I went through. So I told him, I don’t have any place to go back to. I moved out of the house. He said, “One of these days I’ll take the wind out of your sails.” So a few weeks later, we had been going out on the obstacle course in Bivouac, running through the hills, eating out of garbage cans, jumping over water holes and into smoke houses well you’ve seen it on television. Got back to the barracks about ten o clock at night, which would be 22 hundred hours. He came in and he called me; Mayhill front and center. Sir yes sir. Did you – very politely,[laughter] he said “you get your gear and the rest of your body across the street to that barracks over there, you’re following out there tomorrow morning again at 0400 hours for another week of what you just went through.”

EC: [Sigh] Oh no.

HM: Yea, he wasn’t very polite.

EC: No [Laughter].

HM: He shouted and yelled and screamed. Matter of fact I can still hear him today. So I went through it again, not as a team, I went through it by myself. I was singled out, as a form of punishment, trying to break me completely. In the smoke house, I was locked inside, with no smoke mask, no gas mask or anything. Some of the techniques that I had learned, I used those, where you dig into the dirt to release Oxygen and it irritated them, they couldn’t find me because it was all smoky inside. While they were on their hunt for me, I’d bail out through one of the windows and went on to the next obstacle. Then, when I am on top of a cliff, they’d throw me off. Yea, they tried to break me. I decided no, you’re not going to do it. Now there’s the challenges that I had been looking for. I had not had challenges in school. At school it’s just too easy, and to me very dull. Why do I need to know how many spoons full of sugar goes into this bottle of water? I’m not going to use it for anything. But there they challenged me, and I accepted the challenge front and back. I passed and I made it. So my class from basic training
had moved on. Here I am one week later, all by myself, standing on the street corner at Lackind
Air Force Base, waiting for a bus to take me to another Air Force Base to assign me to my next
assignment. Here comes this sergeant down the street, with these guys still in civilian clothes
with their suitcases in hand. He stops them, he walks over to me and I am looking at my stuff and
I don’t need this guy’s stuff anymore. I didn’t say it quite that politely. I said, God, let the bus
come right now. Well, the bus didn’t come.

EC: Of course not.

HM: He stood there and he said, “congratulations, I knew you could do it. You just had to find it
yourself;” he spoke very well, very polite and very nice. Then the bus came and I got on, and as
the bus pulled away, he saluted me. So I saluted back. Well about four months later in Biloxi,
Mississippi, in Keesler Air Force Base where I was going to school, a guy comes into the
barracks and he’s asking for me. He tells me that the sergeant said to tell me hi. I am going to
abbreviate it, I said that SOB. He said why you call him such names? So when I told him the
story, he said yea, I guess he was a SOB but he was a good one too. I will never forget him. He
helped me become who I am, because what did he say to those guys that are in those civilian
clothes? He said if you follow yourself, follow my lead, and if you’re half the man of the one
that is on that bus, you will be a good man in my book. Never had any idea.

EC: Right.

HM: Until four months later. Gives me goose bumps just talking about it now and that’s been 56
years ago. Memories never fade. Especially the good memories. I went on through school there
in Mississippi, met a lot of people, kept in contact with some of them. One of them was Bill
Reed and we met in November 1961. Just a month ago we rode together riding the trains up in
West Virginia, looking at the colors and so. I mean you build a comradery there. There’s other
fellas that I did keep in contact with too. While I was in Mississippi, I was asked to stand Honor
Guard for some various holidays. I guess they picked me because I was always spitting polish
and I kept good creases in my uniform. And yes, my boots were shiny enough that I could brush
my teeth in them. It’s a piece of pride and still carries on today. Not so much the shoes I have on
today, but my motorcycle boots. All these guys out there on their bikes, there dirty, grimy and
dusty. But mine are always polished and shiny. They keep telling me, you are making us look
bad. I say well that’s just my background. That’s what I learned from the military. I also learned
that you can eat a dozen eggs for breakfast and still survive. Because Bill and I used to eat a
dozen eggs for breakfast, each of us probably a pound of bacon, three or four glasses of milk,
couple of glasses of orange juice, toast and jelly. We were burning a lot of calories. But we were
also doing a lot of running on the beach, marching to and from school. Our schools were a block
building inside of a block building with the secret security guards. So here we are, 18 years old,
doing things that people in civilian industry that might even be a junior or executive officer never
get to do. When I was 20 years old, I was asked to take a – I’m jumping from [Cough] different
point, let’s just go back through Mississippi a little bit more. I finished both high school and
finished the technical school. Instead of using the money to get transportation to my next
assignment in Omaha, Nebraska. That’s the time you can stand outside, with your thumb and
hitch hike. That’s how you meet people some very unusual people hitch hiking. Some of them, I
would say, maybe drive a mile, and then; okay this is where I get out. Then others you just want
to stay with them forever; very polite. I had a chance to ride on a train, to the city New Orleans,
which there’s a song about it, I have actually ridden that train. I’ve ridden good buses, I’ve ridden bad buses. I’ve ridden in cars that are about ready to fall apart. I didn’t know what these guys were smoking at the time, I felt funny sitting in the back seat. This is in the 60’s! Never did I touch the weed myself. Around it? Yea. Didn’t want to touch it. So I got to Omaha, Nebraska and that was my assignment. I look back at when I was a kid, about 10 years old. I had seen this move, Strategic Air Command, with Jimmy Stewart Offutt the Air Force Base, Omaha, Nebraska and here I am. Wow? Coincidence? Dream? Couldn’t believe it. It just was – was amazing. There were 22 generals on base. That’s a lot of generals.

EC: That is a lot of generals.

HM: There’s a gym right across the street from my barracks. Excuse me [coughs]. I go to the gym and workout and you know when you are in the gym with your gym shorts and a t-shirt and shoes; you don’t have any rank on you. You get into the sauna and having nothing but a towel wrapped around you. You don’t have your rank. You’re in there with the generals. They don’t know you from anywhere [voice shaken]. Then when you see them on the street, with their stars on their shoulders, you salute, and say “hello, sir,” one of them will look at you and say, “hello, I remember you from the gym.” The generals have a job to do, they’re just people too. General Ryan who is in charge of SAC, Strategic Air Command, he retired one of his four star flags off of his car. He gave it to me and I still have it today. He went on to be one of the joint chief of staff. I called him three finger Jack. Had one finger missing and I’ll never forget him. The way I met him actually, I bumped into him and almost knocked him over. I was on an emergency to get an airplane down. I worked in air traffic control, well control approach. When an airplane took over an emergency or if there was a medevac coming in with congressmen, senators, next of kin/family or somebody from overseas, we always had the radar find tuned. There was a control tower operator, had a radar operator, had the crash crew that was always right there with their lights on and ready to go. So it was top shelf, all the way. Not only there at that base, but all of the bases. It’s good to be – have that pride. So anyway, [Coughs] here I am one day; 20 years old, my commanding officer comes in and says I need you to do a special assignment. I have another I need to tell you that goes back before that but we’ll come back to it. He says I want you to volunteer for me. I said do I have a choice? Well no, not really in the military.

EC: Right, so you are voluntold.

HM: Yea, voluntold. There was three of us. One in the tower, one in the radar room, and one in the radar unit itself, which was alongside of the runway, which was where I was. We spent 36 hours in those positions. Yea.

EC: Why?

HM: I’ll tell you. We had security around us, nobody could get to us. We had meals brought to us that were gourmet meals. They were fantastic. But we didn’t shave and the little sleep we got was either on the floor or in the chair and that was for only maybe for 30 minutes. After that 36 hours, we looked pretty rough. Well, about six o clock one morning, I opened up the radar door to get some fresh air, and I saw all of these cars on this 10,000 foot runway. Now you don’t have cars parked on the side of the runways. There was police cars, there was highway patrol, sheriff cars, air police, military police. I got on the headset and called up to the control tower, and the
commander was up there. I said, “Major, what in the hell is going on? Are we landing President Kennedy today?” All of a sudden, everything started clicking, clicking, clicking, and everybody reporting says, security has just been broken. We are landing President Kennedy today, that’s why you guys were selected. Over here at 20 years old.

EC: Right.

HM: 20 year old kids, with the president of the United States life in our hands.

EC: Right, oh my gosh.

HM: Then after you get out of the military, you go to civilian life and you have to have a general manager to sign a requisition for a damn 39 cents ball point pen. No wonder there are people out there committing suicide today because of the responsibilities at the age of 20 are not included into civilian life. [Voice shaken] Civilian, general management cannot accept it. Not that they don’t understand it, but they can’t accept it. Well, shortly after that, President Kennedy got landed safely, made his big speech out there on the tarmac. They wanted us to go meet him and we said no. We have three days of growth of whiskers, our uniforms are wrinkled, we smell like a billy goat.

EC: Right.

HM: Well, at least drive your vehicle up alongside the airplane and salute him. So I did.

EC: Right.

HM: I was probably maybe 30 feet away. Saluted, he returned the salute.

EC: Wow.

HM: I went back to the barracks, took a shower. Went to –.

EC: [Laughter] Went to sleep.

HM: Mhm, I didn’t shave, I just wanted to go to sleep.

EC: Right.

HM: A few days later, a man by the name of Captain Tram, my direct commander – I was in the workshop and he asked me what are you doing for Thanksgiving? And I said, “Well, the same things as all the other guys on the base I guess, hanging around the barracks, watching T.V, going to the mess hall, having a little turkey.” He said well would you like to come to my house for Thanksgiving? Absolutely, only if I can bring my girlfriend. Which is now my wife of 53 years.


HM: So we showed up at Caption Tram’s house, and I thought there was going to be other people there. No, just Lin, myself and Caption Tram and his wife, Jean. Well at that time, the
enlisted and officers didn’t fraternize. I was enlisted. So I couldn’t tell anyone back at the base what was going on.

**EC: No.**

**HM:** I wasn’t a big brown nosier. And for anybody listening to this they know what a brown noser is.

**EC: Right [Laughter].**

**HM:** That’s a polite way of saying, saying some other words. So Lin and I got married a year later. We had decided to continue to do the same thing that he did for us. Just this last week, we had our Thanksgiving celebration on Friday with four people that had no place to go, have Thanksgiving dinner with us. We have had homeless, widows, widowers, college kids, foreign exchange students, people who can’t speak our language. You name it, we’ve had them. So [coughs] excuse me, anyway after – after we had landed President Kennedy, there’s a story between there and Thanksgiving that I’ve not mentioned. That story is this. Caption Tram came into my barracks, I think the night after we landed Kennedy or maybe two days later. I was so tired I don’t even remember. He said, “You need to go home immediately; your mother is in the hospital.” I said, “No I just got a letter from her today and it’s only one day delivery.” “She’s at the hospital; the Red Cross is taking you out.” So when the Red Cross demands you to do something, there’s no paper work, there is no orders, you are gone. They don’t take that time and he said how will you get home? I have a car and I’ll drive it, it’s a little over 300 miles. This is at ten o’ clock at night. I’ll be there tomorrow morning. And it was between paydays. In the end I had no idea if I had any money or not. So he gave me $20. That’s a lot of money in 1963. I got home and the next day my mother passed away. Taking care of the arrangements there, President Kennedy gets shot and killed. So I call back to the Air Force Base and say do you need me back.

**EC: Right.**

**HM:** No you finish your business there. We know where you are and we know how to get a hold of you if we need to. Didn’t think anything about it at all. Finish up the business. Two days later I get back to the Air Force Base and then that’s when he asked me if I would like to come over for dinner. Here’s the ironic thing about it, 15 years later, there’s a young lady working in the same department that I am. That’s where I was working for Caterpillar, Caterpillar Tractor Company. She came in one Monday morning and said I need to talk to you privately. So we went into a conference room. She said, “I had dinner with my parents over the weekend. They asked me how I liked my new job. I mentioned your name and my father said Harvey who? I told him. He went into a room and came back out with about a 1 inch thick folder.” Immediately after Kennedy was shot and killed, he was an FBI agent that was put on my tail for six months because I had no military orders taking me off the base.

**EC: Oh my gosh.**

**HM:** So that makes me feel good knowing that this country is well protected back then and with the technology’s that we have today. Just think what’s happening. You never can tell.

**EC: No [Sigh].**
HM: You never know. So right after I got to the Air Force Base also. I'm back stepping a little bit because my memory works backwards. [Coughs] I had been there maybe two weeks.

EC: In Omaha?

HM: In Omaha; yes. We were called on to a special order. The door was locked and there was a guard standing at the door. We were informed that the United States of America is in a crisis situation. That Cuba is making a big [unclear] and firing missiles off at our country. President Kennedy will not allow that to happen. So here’s what it basically went down to. There were five of us in the room. One of them was a captain. One of them was a tech sergeant. One’s a staff sergeant. One’s a member of first class. And there was me in second class. I’m the old man on the heed. The commander says to me, you will be in charge of this group that we are going to talk about because you just came from school. You have the technology, the Captain is the one on command for the military but you’re the one in charge of getting this operation done. We were charged with being on an airplane within 15 minutes. Going to Florida. Setting up on a tech runway, abandon highway and take Cuba right out of the water. He said when you get back to your room; there will be a red telephone in your room. No dial on it. Do not pick it up, unless it rings. If it rings, pick it up.

EC: Immediately.

HM: And so with respect, it is the President of the United States.

EC: Wow. Now, is this before he landed at your air base?

HM: Yea.

EC: Oh ok.

HM: Yea, like I said I had to go back a few years, because the memory takes you back.

EC: Yea it does. That’s wild. So what happened after that?

HM: His [unclear] will tell you that the Cuban Missile Crisis lasted 13 days. But we were on work for six weeks.

EC: Wow.

HM: Just to make sure. It was more than 13 days.

EC: Right. Was the six –, well I don’t know, was the six weeks before or after they said it was over?

HM: After.

EC: After, so it was done but we just kept –.

HM: Kept on.
EC: Yea. Wow.

HM: Now the Captain, Captain Tram, was my commander at that time. And then he’s the one who invited us to Thanksgiving. I lost contact with him in 1964 or ‘65. [Coughs] He got transferred someplace else. So my wife and I are raising a family, we have 2 kids, Bruce and Christine. Actually it would be Christine and Bruce, she was the first born. We’re traveling all over the nation. I told the kids: I would get you an in all 48 states before you graduate high school. Alaska and Hawaii are your own adventures and we did it. We stopped at military bases, looked in telephone books, I would look for William Tram. And then the internet came out and we started searching. And I called [unclear] he said I am not the William Tram you are looking for, you called about four years ago. But tell me the story again. So I told him about the Thanksgiving. And how we have been having families come to our house.

EC: Right.

HM: Like payback. [Coughs] As these folks would come to our home for Thanksgiving, I would always mention to them that we were dirt poor when Caption Tram invited us to his home. Today we’ve done pretty well. And someday when you are in a position and you can afford it, invite somebody in and pay it forward again. Our kids do it all the time. So one day, well we lived in California for 20 years, and I had been searching out there for Captain Tram. Excuse me. We’ve been here in South Carolina for almost 12 years now. Eleven years ago, around midnight, I got a hit on the internet for a William Tram. 1911th communication [unclear] in Omaha, Nebraska. YEA! Now he’s a [unclear] general. Retired, living in Tampa, Florida. [Coughs] So out of respect I didn’t call him at midnight. I called him the next morning. Told him who I was. Ah hi how are you doing? Just like we talked last week. I said you remember me. Ah, yea, said yea, we had you over for dinner for Thanksgiving in Omaha and went on and on and on. I told him what I had been doing and trying to find him. Told him what I have been doing over all these years. And I could feel a tear in his eyes on the other end. And I said now do I call you captain? General? He said, “Oh hell, call me Wayne, that’s what you called me when you worked for me.” I said okay Wayne. So we decided to get together at his daughter’s house in Georgia. And Jean, Wayne’s wife, was pregnant with his baby at the time of Thanksgiving; I think she gave birth two days later. And that’s how –.

EC: That’s how close it was?

HM: Ah yes. So we had dinner there. Reminiscing old times. I would tell him names of people and he would tell me where they were. I’d give him a first name and he’d give me a last name or vice versa. Just catching up on 40 years. And yes I gave him his $20 back. Without interest.

EC: Just about to say, doesn’t mean the same thing.

HM: And he kept it.

EC: [Laughing]

HM: Well he’s a retired paid general; $20 to him is like dropping a penny on the street.

EC: Right.
HM: But it was the respect that I paid him back, he respected taking it back. Then four years ago he fell in the shower and broke his neck and died.

EC: Oh no. That’s awful.

HM: Yea, all those [unclear], all those war zones, and he holds three patents for the Air Force. Very intelligent man. Now, his daughter took the story about what we did at Thanksgiving, and she took it to her church and used it as a service for Thanksgiving.

EC: Wow.

HM: So everything works together to have a reason. So all those things that were going on in life, leading up to this. We remember the veterans today, my wife and I. We do a lot of activities, to help our veterans, to help them understand some problems, helping those that maybe don’t have much.

EC: Right.

HM: We can spend a couple dollars every once in a while. We escort the military funerals with Patriot Dart. [Unclear] which was a POWMIA advocate group. Most people say those are motor cycle clubs. No they aren’t. They are organizations that just happen to like riding motor cycles. And we also recently, a year a half ago, started participating with Rocky Lyn, a country-western singer, who is an army veteran, whose organization is called Tribute to the Troops. We [unclear] in October of this year with them. We would go out to people’s homes and let them know that although your husband or your son was killed in [unclear], you will never be forgotten by us. And if there are children, scholarships are awarded. There have been over 40 scholarships with a total of over $600,000 presented to these kids.

EC: Wow.

HM: And Rocky Lyn is the most down to earth and nicest guy you would ever want to meet. If you have ever heard of the song Lipstick that was his number one song.

EC: Yea, that’s great that he is giving back in that way and that you guys can participate in that.

HM: You know with a lot of the military activities, I was asked to come into an interview about my background and my past. And they need to talk a little bit about today also, because my past makes me who I am, and who I am today, I can touch and effect on a lot of people.

EC: Right.

HM: Um, Bob Free, a Vietnam Veteran. Confined to a wheel chair. He transports our disabled veterans down to the VA hospital in Columbia and he has to use a wheelchair to drive. He came to the veteran’s advisory council in York County one day, [unclear] we need a veteran’s memorial highway. On just the ninth of this month, we dedicated to veteran’s memorial highway. Right out here at North Western high school, [unclear]. We did it and it expanded, all the way up past York.
EC: Wow.

HM: So one person can make a difference. And people that are protesting, or be burning the flag, taking a knee at a football game. There’s a right way to protest and a wrong way to protest. And we will always stand behind the right way to protest and help and support. It’s just sometimes our country has forgotten what we are about. And when we take a look at suicide rate, the [unclear] has taken so much news. The veteran suicide rate is three times as much, so that’s my next [unclear]. For the past of what I have had or what I can do today to help in the future, I have a few more years left. I’ll be 75 in another six weeks, well, five weeks now. And I do not feel 75. I feel like a 25 year old trapped in a 75 year old man’s body. But hopefully I can still make some changes. And those who may be listening to this sometime in the future, whether it be in 2025 or 2525, if we have the media to play this at that time.

EC: [Laughing] right.

HM: If they just take a look back at what’s been done today, by one or two people, and look at the Revolutionary War and the people that continue on our legacy, call the [unclear] of the American Revolution. They can trace their [unclear] back. They stand strongly behind this country, and if [unclear] stand for this country, get out of the way for somebody else to. Go someplace else where you are happy. And if you are not happy here, and you wanna stay, then make it happy the right way. Don’t be an ass while doing it. I could have said it a whole lot worse, I tried to clean it up as much as I could.

EC: [Laughs] I appreciate that. Just so we can put it online without too many warnings. No, but I appreciate you talking about, you know, how you tried to give back to this community. It’s something that I think is, and this is of course just my opinion – but is something that we don’t always maybe highlight like we should or the way that the things that are out there to help. Because like you were saying about the suicide rate, you know, yea these people need help and need to be listened to and that is a reason why I am working with this project.

HM: Well, when I take a look back like I mentioned earlier, my child hood years were really rough. My teen years I just didn’t care. Then when my mother died, I made a promise right there that I would never go against our great maker, which I call God. And other people can call him whatever they want. There’s gotta be something greater than the human body. Even with atheist, we somehow came about or whatever that belief is, that’s their prerogative. But I made that promise and hold to it as I got to where I am today and the people that are supporting what my wife and I are doing, we are just the ring masters. We are the guardian of making things happen; they’re the ones out there that are the supporting groups that make it available to us. So thanks for the advocates but it’s all of us, it’s a team effort.

EC: Right, it is it is. Which actually reminds me, could you talk a little bit about – we talked on the phone before you came in for this interview, about the project, where you give blankets to the veterans. What is that project called again?

HM: It’s called Quilts of Valor.

EC: Quilts of Valor, could you talk about that a little bit.
HM: [Coughs] sure before we get there I do want to clarify another thing also. With me dropping out of high school, choosing to go to the Air Force, I got this [unclear] prep school. I was in the Air Force for, this didn’t even come out in the interview it came out when we did the paper work but in order to go to the [unclear] school. You are supposed to be 21 years of age. You are supposed to have four years in the military, and at least a year and a half time in your ranking grade. Well I was 20 years old, I had less than four years, I had just a year time in grade. So they were grooming me for something, and I went to the non-commissions preparation school. I gradated being number eight in the class. Just think what if I would have been a little bit more mature where I would have been. I did that then I went through a [unclear] with caterpillar. And some other classes that I had taken. For a high school dropout, I taught college for four years as a guest instructor.

EC: Wow.

HM: And [unclear] Donald McDoague gave me the accreditations of having my master’s degree because that’s the job that they hired me for required a master’s degree. Although I didn’t have the shingle, I had the accreditation. So basically I have the equivalent of a master’s degree in my pocket. Now the Quilts of Valor, I started that 14 years ago with Katherine Roberts out of Delaware, whose son was deployed to Iraq and she was so nervous about him being in a war zone, and she had nightmares. She dreamed that he’s being attacked and then one day he has a quilt wrapped around him, and the enemies can’t get to him. She thought that that could be one of my quilts. So she made a quilt and then took it to Walker E hospital, and presented it to a wounded warrior there. [Coughs] Touched with emotion from him and her. She went back home and asked her friends to help her make quilts, for the thousand at the hospital. And in three years they made just over 100 quilts.

EC: Wow.

HM: Today there’s a volunteering group, over 6,000 nationwide, with no paid staff. It’s a 501 C3 foundation, even the executive directors and boarder directors, no paid staff. We don’t receive payment for traveling, hotels, meals; we take it all out of our own pocket or from donations. We have made over 175,000 quilts and awarded them to our veterans. Just Saturday we awarded nine of them at the American Legend here in town.

EC: Wow.

HM: I have had generals; I have had Medal of Honor recipients hug me and cry on my shoulder in receiving these. They’re not a gift, they are an award. When I first started doing this four years ago, I was a basket case of tears. I still carry two handkerchiefs just in case, and once in a while it does come up. One of the fellows this last Saturday that we awarded to, he sent an email off to one of the [unclear]. He said, “You have done something that our family has not been able” – there comes those goose bumps.

EC: I know [Laughter].

HM: “You’ve done something that our family has not been able to do for well over 10 years. Family reunions, funerals, weddings, holidays, this is the first time in 10 years our entire family has been together.”
EC: Wow.

HM: [unclear] Quilt of Valor. We had one father a couple years ago, come up to me after and asked me to take a message to the quilters. And again this is where people make a difference. He said I was in Vietnam; shot up pretty bad. Came home, my family had nothing to do with me. My wife left me. I have nightmares. So this one morning I had got up and had plans for the day and I remember there was a little card sitting on my dresser, Quilts of Valor day. I’ll do my plans this evening, I don’t need to do them during the day. I promised I’d be there, so here I am. I was scared to death of all these people. There’s about 400 in attendance. Is it to have total strangers to wrap their arms around you with a quilt, that’s worth hundreds of dollars, handmade, special for me, with my name on it and say thank you and welcome home. So I changed my plans, I’ve canceled them. I was going to commit suicide.

EC: Oh my gosh [Sigh].

HM: Yea. We’ve changed lives. Sometimes we don’t know it. Just like when you go out here on the street today or tomorrow and you see somebody and you say hi to them, it’s how you say hi. How it affects our lives. It’s how they respond back to you or if they say hi to you how it affects your life. We are a product of everything that has ever happened in the past and our pastor at our church one day said do you ever do anything that you wish you could go back and change? He said don’t, because if you do you’re a different person. You know, I had told the drill instructor to go to hell. Probably one of the best things that I have ever said in my life to straighten me out.

EC: [Laughter] Right. Yea that’s funny, thinking about. That’s a good thing you said it, I guess. So he can try and break you and, you know, go on with honors.

HM: Well they were trying to break me but they didn’t because they built me. They made me who I am. That suicide that I was talking about, that’s the second one that we knew of and we’ve been involved in.

EC: Wow.

HM: The other one was out in Nevada. He was getting ready to blow his brains out and with the quilt that we have presented to him, changed his attitude. He went and got counseling and instead of a three month program, he stepped it into a six month program. He is now a mentor to those who have the same problems.

EC: Wow. That is incredible. Yea that’s incredible. It seems very much to me that you know your time in the military, especially during Vietnam, is a driving force behind behind everything else that you have been able to do in your life, in ways that you are able to give back.

HM: I was only in four years. I did not go into the war zone, but I was treated with the same disrespect. Called a baby killer. I had people throw things at me. [Coughs] I had twice, probably, could have gone to a bigger number easily. When I had gotten out of the Air Force, the Reserves from Omaha had asked me to join them. They said, “We will give you one strike promotion to staff sergeant and will send you to officer candidate school and after one year as an officer you can go back to active duty as commission officer.” They said you have 30 days to make up your
mind. Three weeks later they got activated and got sent straight to Vietnam. So I didn’t. I got out. My wife went and finished college in Omaha as a registered nurse. Moved to Davenport, Iowa, I was there for about a month in the replenishment program. I get a letter of recall to active duty for 10 more months. So I take it into my manager who is Reed Kemble and told him I’m giving you a 30 day notice. He said do you want to go? I said not really.

EC: Right [Laughter].

HM: He said why are they recalling you? Because I was on a critical call for the military occupation.

EC: Right.

HM: He said let me hold on to this letter for a couple of days and let me get back to you. About two days later he called me into his office. He said you are going to get a new letter resending this order. I said how did you know that. He said they sent out a counting draft report and you are now a critical civilian in occupation and we have you now. That’s where you go. As I mentioned to you on the phone before the interview, those who have been there, no explanation is necessary. And if you have not been there, no explanation is possible. I have not been there. I don’t have the same feelings, but I do have feelings for those who have been there.

EC: Yea. And I am guessing you – did you serve with people who have been there or did you know people pretty directly that you have been around?

HM: Both. My roommate in Omaha called me up one day after he had shipped out. He said how are you doing? I said I’m doing good, you have a pretty good line from overseas to here. He said I am not overseas. He said you just got through landing an air medevac? I said yes I did, how did you know? He said I was on it. I said I am over across the street at the hospital. Yea.

EC: Ahhh, Wow.

HM: Three days before, he left. When he got off the airplane over there he got shot in his shoulder. They put him right on a medevac and brought him straight right back to Omaha.

EC: Oh my gosh.

HM: Non-stop.

EC: As soon as he hit the ground. Wow.

HM: Sniper shot. And this rocky wind in the country western scene, you remember I told you about? Suicides to him are not a suicide. It’s a sniper shot from the Taliban’s, 7000 miles away. That they have taken 10 years to hit, that’s a good way of looking at it. We don’t know what works with the minds of these [unclear]. Back in World War two, in Korea it was called shell shock.

EC: Right.
HM: Today it’s called PTSD.

EC: Right.

HM: Whatever fancy name it is, it doesn’t matter. Devastations of wars that these people carry with them forever. If they can get it out, it helps.

EC: Right.

HM: Some of them just cannot get it out, emotionally.

EC: Right.

HM: It’s too tough.

EC: To hard. Okay well I have just have another one last question really. Just because you talked about how you worked with the Caterpillar plant or factory.

HM: Yes

EC: Um, in Davenport, after you got out of the Air Force, and I know you have said that you have not gone into the war zone but that you were affected by the stigma still of that war. I was just wondering that if that ever came up in your work place or was that kind of an out in the streets civilian thing, or like how is that? I guess I was just wondering, you know, how do people know that you have been to the military. How do they know, how do they have the chance to do things like call you a baby killer and things like that? I was just wondering.

HM: You can almost identify a veteran by the way they walk and by the way they act.

EC: That’s true [Laughter].

HM: Or by the way they talk.

EC: That’s true [Laughter].

HM: Some of their mannerisms.

EC: And the haircuts [Laughter].

HM: And the haircuts.

EC: Especially in the 60’s right? Yea. [Laughter]

HM: See I am bald as a bowling ball. [Coughs] yes. I had one father come up to me. I had transferred from the old Caterpillar plant to the new one. I was still doing the replenishment and this guy just wouldn’t talk to me. After a few weeks he came up to me and he just lit right into me with not so nice language. And called me a draft dodger. And that I was just taking this
replenishment to keep out from going into the military. And I [unclear] somebody that I didn’t know that I had been in for four years, I had already been recalled.

**EC:** Right.

**HM:** And got referred on that.

**EC:** Right.

**HM:** And he came to me just sobbing with tears, and he was a veteran himself from Korea.

**EC:** Oh okay.

**HM:** So how do you identify it? How do you know? Just little things like that.

**EC:** Right.

**HM:** Then when I went to California working for northern up on south palmer and then McDonald Douglas seat 17. Back into the military realm again as a civilian. Then a person kept on one day when I was at northern and they said no I wasn’t at northern I was at McDonald Douglas, and they asked me if I could put a team together and build a part within 48 hours, I said sure. I looked at it and said yea no problem. Except for one. This is a civilian air plane. Gave me a contract. They said read that title a little bit more. Oh crap. Air Force One.

**EC:** Oh my gosh. [Laughter]

**HM:** They were literally just flying out.

**EC:** Oh yea. Wow.

**HM:** Yep. We did it.

**EC:** That’s awesome. Wow.

**HM:** So how do you feel about this interview?

**EC:** I think it’s been good.

**HM:** How is it compared to some of the others?

**EC:** Well it’s different. I think each interview is different.

**HM:** As it should be.

**EC:** As yes – as it should be. You know you have definitely touched on much more – kind of on how the military – your experiences in the military impacted the rest of your life.

**HM:** Four years makes a big difference for the rest of your life.
EC: Right. Yea definitely. I think that’s really important to talk about, you know? I think that’s hard sometimes for people to reflect on. So some of my other interviews, you know they want to talk about training a lot more when they got in right? Or they want to talk a little bit about when they were in the military but it’s all of the really funny stories, you know they don’t want to talk about any of the harder parts, which is understandable. But yea this interview, I think really sheds an important light on how you can take those experiences from the military and apply them in a really positive way. Right, and apply them in a way that makes you continuously try to be helping people. Which I think is really awesome.

HM: It’s one of those points I want to make for the future. There are people out there trying to step to the future and hopefully what we are doing today will be recognized 100 to 200 years from now, one or two people did make a difference.

EC: Right.

HM: And I’m saying there’s another group out there where you have the Army, the Marines, the Navy, the Air Force and the Coast Guard. Five major ranks in the military services. There is a sixth branch. There’s no emblem, there’s no recognition, but it’s better than all those five branches. And those are the spouses and families of our veterans. Without them back on the home front, taking care of things, we wouldn’t have anything to come home too.

EC: Right.

HM: So my thanks and love it to my spouse, Linda and to all the spouses across the world. It doesn’t matter if you’re a spouse to a U.S. veteran or the Canadian Air Force or someplace else overseas. The spouses are the backbone. That keep the home fires going.

EC: Right.

HM: Not all the spouses are female.

EC: Nope.

HM: Now some females out there, like Melinda Woodhurst.

EC: Yea.

HM: Out there in the war zone twice.

EC: I know.

HM: Her spouse is at home. Fantastic lady.

EC: Yea, she is amazing.

HM: And there are still two million female veterans out there walking out on the streets today that need to get proper recognition.
EC: Yea, they do.

HM: And back in World War two, the supply airplanes that were taking supplies from here over there, were flown by women. And it wasn’t till just a few years ago that they got recognition as being a war veteran with authorization to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

EC: Right.

HM: Times have changed. Times are changing. And whoever is listening to this interview sometime in the future, we hope that you can say yes they have changed for the better and continue carrying the torch. Thank you very much.

EC: Yea. Thank You! I really appreciate you coming in and doing this interview.

HM: Absolutely.

END OF INTERVIEW, 1:02:43