

Gerry Royals: An Oral History  
Conducted by Aidan Wright

30 November 2018

Professor Birkner  
Historical Methods

**[Editor's Note: This interview was conducted in Weidensall 301 on the Gettysburg College Campus on Monday, November 19<sup>th</sup> 2018. Although there was a large Vietnam event in which many veterans returned to campus, and were subsequently interviewed this was conducted after the fact due to an existing conflict for the interviewer. In addition, the interviewer's stutter has been removed from the transcript to improve readability.]**

Wright: Alright, so I am here with Gerry Royals, and we are going to talk about his life and specifically his experience with Vietnam. I guess the first thing that is really pertinent for this interview is I want to establish what your family life was like. What was your family unit? Mom, dad, siblings?

Royals: Only child. North New Jersey, six miles out of New York. Place called Teaneck.

Wright: How far were you from the city?

Royals: Six miles from New York.

Wright: OK, so really close.

Royals: Very close. My high school was Teaneck high school, we were known as the highwaymen, because the highway led to New York.

Wright: Oh, nice. And your parents, what did they do for a living?

Royals: My mother was a housewife, my father was a foreign freight forwarder in New York City and commuted to New York every year for 35 to 40 years.<sup>1</sup>

Wright: Were you very close with your family?

Royals: Yes, it was a small unit of three people.

Wright: Fair. So you lived six miles from New York, how big a part was New York of your childhood?

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<sup>1</sup> A foreign freight forwarder dealt with U.S. manufacturers shipping products all around the world.

Royals: New York, because it was convenient, I could go over there, I worked three summers in New York, downtown, for my father's business. I was what they called a runner. Back in those days, you didn't have internet or anything of that nature available, and you carried documents to various places. In foreign freight forwarding my father was there doing things with steamship lines and consulates of the foreign countries. And you would have to carry papers to them. For the people to authenticate, you had to go to the customs house in New York to get customs clearance, because this was during World War II, during the late, mid, early 40s. I worked three summers during my high school time in New York City.

Wright: That seems like a mildly stressful job for a high school student. Would you agree, or was it not really that stressful?

Royals: It was a job, I got 25 cents an hour. That was the wage at that time.

Wright: Was that considered a lot or a little?

Royals: That was average wage. Everything was much, much smaller in denomination compared to what today's \$17 is. I think it's Arby's or one of them that has a sign, "Start working for \$17 an hour."

Wright: That's pretty solid.

Royals: McDonald's has the same. 25 cents an hour was the wage at that time.

Wright: So you're in high school. Were you a good student, average student, bad student?

Royals: No, bad student.

Wright: Bad student?

Royals: Played around too much, played sports, that was my concentration.

Wright: What did you play?

Royals: Soccer and baseball were my two prime sports. Also played basketball, but not that big and not that good.

Wright: [Chuckles] Fair enough. When did you start looking at coming to Gettysburg, as a college?

Royals: After high school I went to Prep School for one year in Pennington Prep School, New Jersey. We had a student or two here, from Pennington.

Wright: And so that was to prep you for college?

Royals: That was the year after high school, so I came to college here in Gettysburg the year after. My class from high school went to college...and I came here in the Spring of '48, and met the people here, and liked the people, they liked me apparently, and they liked the idea I was a pretty good soccer player. So, I met the soccer coach, who then was a professor, and he got to supplement.<sup>2</sup> There was no coach, assistant coach, big staff, here at the college. He was a one-time coach, as a professor he taught French and Spanish. That was his prime job, but he got a little supplement for coaching.

Wright: And he was also the coach, wow.

Royals: That was very different then it is today, believe me [laughs].

Wright: Yeah, for sure. You mentioned that they liked you for your sporting ability. Was that prior to you coming to college, or was it once you arrived?

Royals: I was a good athlete in high school and prep school, but when I came to college, back in our days, '48 to '52, you could not play varsity sports as a freshmen.

Wright: Oh really? Here?

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<sup>2</sup> The supplement is the salary the professor would have made for coaching soccer.

Royals: NCAA rule. NCAA. So they had freshmen teams, so we did that. And the next three years you could play varsity, which I did. I was a pretty good player, I made first team all-district all three years in my soccer career. Baseball was a little different story. Do you know the name Eddie Plank... he was a Hall of Famer from Gettysburg.

Wright: Is it related to Plank gym?

Royals: Plank Gym is dedicated to him. His brother was our baseball coach, his younger brother. A guy named Ira Plank.

Wright: And so is the Plank Gym dedicated to Eddie or Ira?

Royals: Eddie was not the coach, Ira was, his younger brother. And we played from right across by Old Dorm, the administration building.

Wright: Oh, Penn Hall?

Royals: Penn Hall now. Between there and this building, Weidensall, was home plate on the baseball diamond. You hit out to Plank Gymnasium.

Wright: So this [motioning towards the space in between Penn Hall and Musselman Library] was a baseball field?

Royals: That was a baseball field.

Wright: Wow!

Royals: There was nothing out there in right field, by the library, that was right field.

Wright: There was nothing there?

Royals: Nothing there. All open. The next building was the science hall, now I think it's English or something.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The 'science hall' Royals refers to here is now Breidenbaugh.

Wright: Nowadays the campus revolves around this area [referring to the space in between Penn Hall and Musselman Library] because you have some major buildings. Was the huge hub of student activity in a different location?

Royals: This was the Student Christian Association Building at the time. On the first floor, Friday nights would have a “sock-hop” or dance, on the first floor. The fraternities and the four sororities all had their individual activities. The sports teams of course did their things.

Wright: You mentioned prior to our talk here that you were a Sig Chi. When did you rush?

Royals: Freshmen year, first semester was rush, back then, not delayed rush second semester. You went to the different fraternities, I think we had ten of them at the time. And you went around to the different houses and made your choice. Then you rushed and you were a pledge for six months. Got initiated in March.

Wright: Six months? Wow, that is much longer than the current system.

Royals: You started [college], in September, was rush. At the end of August, you started college then. You rushed right away. Men and women both rushed right away. That was a tie that you created. I’ve stayed in touch with Sigma Chis from my year. There’s only six of us left, out of sixteen and then the follow on class of five from mid-semester that year. But there’s only six of us left out of the class. I am the class president for class of ’52. We have 84 left out of 341.

Graduates of that time. I stay pretty much in touch, I deal with the alumni office quite a bit.

Wright: Good, good. What were the factors that led you to becoming a Sig Chi?

Royals: The personality of the people I met. I had one friend who was a Sig Chi from my hometown that I knew.

Wright: That helps.

Royals: I knew two or three SAEs from my hometown. I seriously rushed five or six houses.

Wright: Wow, that's a lot.

Royals: There was ten or eleven. Most of the time you go to one house, and if you didn't really like it, you didn't go back again, because they had open house type rush. If you knew somebody there, they would invite you. And that's what happened at a couple of the houses. Phi Delt invited me, Phi Gam, went to ATO one time cause there was a guy on the soccer team that was on the Varsity when I was a freshmen. He invited me to go down the ATO house. You know where the ATO house was?

Wright: I don't know where it used to be.

Royals: The Eisenhower Institute, now, was the ATO house.

Wright: That is so bizarre.

Royals: That is where President Eisenhower and his wife lived in 1917 [1918].

Wright: And then it became the ATO house?

Royals: The ATOs got it, and sometime in the 60s, don't know how that happened because I wasn't around, they built the new ATO house and the Phi Psi house. Phi Psi house used to be right out here by the College Old Dorm. Next to Glatfelter there's this little old lodge? That's the Sigma Chi lodge. That was the original Sigma Chi house. And right across the street from that, down towards Plank Gym, was the Phi Kappa Psi House. So they destroyed that one and took it out, and at the same time, the ATO house took it over, and built the two new houses down by the Tiber.<sup>4</sup>

Wright: Phi Psi was gone for a while, actually –

Royals: Yeah, they're trying to [re]colonize now.

Wright: They're new group, they have a little charter house next to Fiji.

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<sup>4</sup> The Tiber is referring to the small creek that flows between the ATO house and the hill that leads up into town.

Royals: Yeah, that was always there in our era. That's been there forever.

Wright: Oh, it was? And was that always the Phi Psi house?

Royals: No, Phi Psi house was the big house they have now, but located out here....

Wright: OK, so you were in Sig Chi, and you were also on the soccer team –

Royals: Soccer and baseball.

Wright: How did your sports affect your fraternity choice, if at all.

Royals: Not initially.

Wright: Because sports weren't yet a big focus for you, when you were rushing?

Royals: Well, sports were a focus.

Wright: Maybe you weren't as ingrained yet? Into the sport groups.

Royals: As freshmen you couldn't play, hence you didn't really get to know anyone. You scrimmaged against the Varsity team, that was how I got the ATO invitation, scrimmaging against them, and same with Phi Gam. They had a guy on the varsity soccer team when we were freshmen. And we played freshman baseball. Back in those days, we played Penn State main campus, University of Maryland, Naval Academy, played them every year, and for a college with 1,250 students, 250 being women, 1000 guys, we played well above our heads, as far as competition goes. Penn State was probably twenty to thirty thousand students.

Wright: Yeah, huge.

Royals: That's the way it was back then. Dark ages [both chuckle]. The Sigma Chi house and the SAE house were both the sports houses. We had football players, baseball, basketball, and wrestlers, between those two houses, mainly. Other houses had some athletes, but not in the density. Hence, when it came to academia, Sigma Chi and SAE were the anchors.

Wright: As in bad?

Royals: Bad, as in GPAs. Now Sigma Chi is on top. A transition of what, seventy years?

Wright: They have lost the sport reputation –

Royals: Yeah over the years.

Wright: Yeah, it's been seventy something years, right?

Royals: Seventy years.

Wright: That will naturally change anyway.

Royals: We have one or two guys on the swim team and they have a couple guys who do track.

We were pretty dense. 1948, when I came. The house had sixty some brothers, and forty some of them were World War II veterans. They were all pretty much athletes. They had been in the war and came back starting with the G.I. bill, which paid tuition for them back then. They came to the college and played sports. Their personalities were very mature, because they had seen and done things. It had an influence on all of us, just talking with them.

Wright: Were you a student with them?

Royals: I was a lousy student.

Wright: What was the timeframe for the World War II vets –

Royals: The last ones probably graduated in '50.

Wright: Were you a student with them?

Royals: Yes, but they were in more advanced classes. Back then, freshmen had mandatory subjects. You had to take Bible –

Wright: Bible?

Royals: -- you had to take literary foundations, contemporary civilization. You know where Brua Chapel is?

Wright: No, I don't actually.

Royals: Kline theater on campus? Right down there by the Phi Gam house. That little theater, opposite the –

Wright: Schmucker?

Royals: Opposite Schmucker is a little –

Wright: I think we call it Kline now. We call it Kline Theater nowadays.

Royals: Yeah, Kline. But that was Brua Chapel. We had mandatory Chapel attendance. Twice a week. Mandatory attendance taken. Turned into the dean if you missed. Mandatory.

Wright: And was that a school-wide thing?

Royals: Mandatory. Every student, every student.

Wright: Would every student go the same service at the same time?

Royals: The same chapel, usually 9 or 9:30, Tuesday and Thursday, twice a week.

Wright: So you would have every student in the college there?

Royals: Every freshman student.

Wright: Oh, freshmen student. OK.

Royals: Freshmen could not walk on grass. Freshmen boys couldn't talk to freshmen girls.

Freshmen girls had to wear a name-sign with their name and hometown, on it. We had tribunals.

Wright: It is just such a different culture.

Royals: It is! That's hazing today. The college sanctioned it, and ran it. They had tribunals to render punishment.

Wright: It is so hard to believe that is what the culture was.

Royals: That was the way it was, and everybody accepted it.

Wright: Did they have the freshman caps when you were here?

Royals: Yep, we all had to wear it. If you got caught without it, you got turned into tribunal.

Wright: What was a tribunal like?

Royals: Tribunal gave out punishments. My wife, who I met here, got married here, she did something wrong. Her tribunal gave her a sentence of wearing two mousetraps around her neck for a week.

Wright: That is actually astonishing.

Royals: That was sanctioned and the college enforced it. You couldn't go in the side doors of Glatfelter. Freshmen had to use the sides.

Wright: Were you ever caught with any violations?

Royals: No, I escaped. One of my friends, he was a Lambda Chi, he ended up being the salutatorian of our class, number two guy, ended up a doctor. He got caught doing something.

Wright: Doing what? Do you know?

Royals: Probably talking to a girl or something [both chuckle].

Wright: Probably.

Royals: His tribunal punishment was he had to wear a coat hanger on his head with a dead fish in front of it for five days.

Wright: And go to class with it?

Royals: Yep, go to class He had to have that dead fish or he got reincarnated into the tribunal.

Wright: Lord.

Royals: And the college enforced this. That was the culture we were in. Very different.

Wright: Was there a culture of hazing on the various sports teams you were on.

Royals: No, everything was very supportive in the sports programs. [Wright and Royals go on a side tangent about the current hazing culture on campus]

Wright: What was your major?

Royals: Business. We only had about six majors in our era.<sup>5</sup>

Wright: Six total types of majors?

Royals: Six total majors. A lot of teaching, a lot of our classmates went to teaching. We had men's Army and Air Force ROTC on campus. Probably forty or fifty in each, because that was during the Korean War. You were subjected to the draft if you weren't in college and in one of those. You could be drafted out of college back then. And you had no recourse because that's the way the government was functioning. A lot of us went into the ROTC, and out of our class we had 25 or so seniors out of 300 students who took commissions right out of college. Six of us were what we call distinguished military graduates and got what was called a direct commission, just like the West Point cadettes. Into the regular Army, not just the Reserves. The other guys got reserve commissions. Hence that other guy I showed you the picture of, Tommy Gearey, from Phi Psi, he and I were two of the six who took regular army commissions. That meant we were committed to a term of three years minimum, to the service, whereas the other guys were only committed for two, as Reserves.

Wright: And so you went straight from here into the service?

Royals: Here into the service.

Wright: Did that mean that you went straight to Korea?

Royals: Well, no, I went to training. Where you got trained. They always trained you first. Do you know the name Clark Field?

Wright: Here? Yeah I do.

Royals: He was a classmate. SAE. Still alive, lives out in Minnesota – I mean Montana....

Wright: Was he also in the –

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<sup>5</sup> Here Mr. Royals underestimates the amount of majors offered by Gettysburg College in the 1950s.

Royals: He was a soccer player.

Wright: -- was he also in the ROTC?

Royals: He was in the Air Force ROTC. He went to England when I went to Korea. [Hearty laugh]. The Air Force lived a little better than us, but he could have gone to Korea. They sent him to England.

Wright: When did you join the ROTC?

Royals: My freshman year. You do four years of program. I met last weekend at the Vietnam thing,<sup>6</sup> the Cadets that were on campus were dressed in the fatigues, and of course they have to go to Dickinson [college] for their classes. They commute to Dickinson for the ROTC classes.

Wright: Do they? I didn't know that.

Royals: Yep, because the unit left here in '93. All the liberal professors just thought it was terrible to have military, hence they shut down for almost ten years and started up again in the early 2000s.

Wright: That's a shame.

Royals: First they went to Mount Saint Mary's, and now they're going to Carlisle, to Dickinson. They go up a couple days a week, but there's about 35 of them on campus that go there. Hopefully they'll get the unit back here, so they don't have to do that commute a couple of times a week. They seem like a nice bunch of kids. You might have one or two in your house.<sup>7</sup>

Wright: We don't have any in Sigma Nu, but I do know several from my various classes here, and they are all fine guys.

Royals: Yeah, and I met some of them and it was nice chatting with them. I just feel sorry that they have to make that commute a couple of times a week.

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<sup>6</sup> Here Royals refers to Gettysburg College's Vietnam Memorial Ceremony on 10 November 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Royals is referring to Sigma Nu, which Wright is a member of.

Wright: Do you know how long the drive is?

Royals: Oh, it is about 30 miles to Carlisle.

Wright: It's not terrible, but –

Royals: It's 30 something miles, it's a pain in the butt.

Wright: Of course yeah. OK, so you joined [ROTC] your freshmen year, what was that process like, of deciding you wanted to join the ROTC?

Royals: It was either that or get drafted. It wasn't a very good option.

Wright: Did you realize during your freshmen year that you wanted to join, or was that prior to coming to college?

Royals: I knew I had to join. Most all of us knew that if we didn't want to get drafted that it was a wise choice to spend four years with the ROTC program. Which we did all four years.

Wright: Moving on towards the end of your career here, did you know that you were likely to be sent off towards Korea, or somewhere else?

Royals: Korea was a definite potential. Some went to Europe, but at least half of the guys went to Korea in 1954, which was after the fighting but during the truce period. Six Gettysburg graduates got together at Tom Gearey's place. He was in the Second Division, I was in the Seventh, Ray Lowe was in the Seventh, Sam D. Simone was in the Second, Lowell Sauers and one other, can't remember who it was right now, but six of us got together at Tom Gearey's area, had a beer or two, and went back to our units. Spread out across Korea. Funny thing about Tom and I, I put 26 in, he put 22 in the military, and we only met three times in our careers. Once was in Korea, twice was in Vietnam.

Wright: Were you guys friends prior to the war?

Royals: Yeah, we played soccer together for all four years. Sam D. Simone was an SAE football player, and he's still alive in New Jersey. He's a retired Chief Judge for the State of New Jersey.

Wright: That's impressive.

Royals: He assigned all the judges for twenty years in New Jersey. Sam, super nice guy, about 6'2, looks a little bit like you, played football, lineman, and he's been totally blind for twenty-five years. Totally. He lives in South Jersey. He's retired there, he would be an interesting guy to interview, just about the courts. We met in Korea, at Tom's place.

Wright: Flashing back to your time here, were you nervous at the prospect of heading off to Korea?

Royals: Not nervous, no. I knew it is what I had decided for the career. I was married.

Wright: But you weren't scared of combat, or anything like that?

Royals: No. But I got married and met my wife here in college, I don't know if you're gonna meet one or not.

Wright: [Laughs] We'll see.

Royals: She was the editor of the yearbook, I will show you a picture of her later. She was super smart, and she graduated in three and a half years, without summer school. We didn't have summer school back then. She had three hours short of a double major. We got married by the professor who eventually became the chairman of the Bible department, at the seminary on the hill, in the middle of my senior year. She graduated in January of '52, and I had my last six months to go.

Wright: How did you guys meet?

Royals: I saw her walking across campus, as a freshman with a sign on. Back in those days, the fraternities all had kitchens. They ate in the houses. The fraternity would invite a sorority group

to come to Sunday dinner. Chaperoned, with a faculty member of some sort, present at the fraternity, while the girls were there. Girls could not go in the house. They were off limits unless invited and/or chaperoned. And that's just the way it was. I got my big brother to invite their sorority, and her specifically to come to dinner, so I could talk to her in the fraternity house, because I wasn't on campus, so to speak, where you could talk to a freshmen. We met, and then we started dating a little bit of freshmen, sophomore, junior year, and then got married halfway through my senior year. There are some nice girls out there. I've met some of the girls at the fraternity house [Sigma Chi] at different social functions and stuff like that. There seem to be some very nice young ladies here.

Wright: I agree.

Royals: Look around, look them over. But we got married on the Chapel on the hill, at the Seminary. This was under construction [motioning towards the current Chapel on campus], I think it opened in '53, a year after I graduated. I wasn't concerned about going to Korea, I knew that was required. Eventually the six of us got together, we all swapped a beer or two, and had a good time, told a couple of lies, and got back.

Wright: What was the general campus climate towards the war?

Royals: Korea? Very supportive. The United Nations forces, is what was driving it, General [Douglas] MacArthur and [Matthew] Ridgeway took over for him. Everybody thought it was a good thing to stop the North Koreans from devastating South Korea. If you look at South Korea today, you can look at it and say, "That's a success story of how our government was able to save a country, and now it's a very viable country, with multi-faceted industries and everything. South Vietnam could have been the same. We had won the war, as far as fighting, but the spirit at home was very anti-Vietnam, and as a result, even the North Vietnamese general, who ran the

war for them, admitted after the war that, “We had won the war, but the American public beat the American military.” And it’s true, that’s exactly how it was. We could have made South Vietnam just like South Korea. We were on the road to doing that at the time we pulled out in the 70s. It’s a sad lesson, but we could have been just as successful with those people because they were just as dedicated to being a country as the South Koreans were.

Wright: We can delve a lot further in to that later, but we first we need to get through Korea, and then we’ll get further into the Vietnam side of things. When you graduated, what was the timeline for going off to Korea?

Royals: I graduated, went to Fort Benning,<sup>8</sup> then to Fort Dix<sup>9</sup> –

Wright: And was that the summer and fall after?

Royals: That was ’52, summer and fall. ’53 back to Benning again. ’54 Korea. Then Korea to Okinawa for a year.<sup>10</sup> They called it inter-theater transfer. My wife and two children, one I had not seen, came to Okinawa and we were there for one year.

Wright: So you were living on Okinawa?

Royals: On a post in Okinawa, which is now part of Japan again. We gave it back to Japan in the 70s or 80s. Back then we occupied Okinawa as a military base, because China was a threat.

Wright: And that was less of a combat duty?

Royals: No, that was definitely not combat. Once you left Korea you were out of the combat zone.

Wright: So you spent one year there?

Royals: One year in Okinawa. My wife came over on a boat and two younger kids.

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<sup>8</sup> Fort Benning is a military post in Columbus, Georgia.

<sup>9</sup> Fort Dix is located in Central New Jersey.

<sup>10</sup> Okinawa is a key strategic island located in the Pacific Ocean, located East of China and South of Japan.

Wright: When did you have your kids?

Royals: I had one at Fort Benning in '53, she's now 65, retired schoolteacher from Northern Virginia. And my son was born while I was in Korea, at Valley Forge Military Hospital back then. My wife lived in Pennsylvania while I was in Korea. She took a boat over to Okinawa.

Wright: What was it like being apart from your family?

Royals: It was always bad. You thrive on your duties and what your job is, and I had a couple of good jobs in Korea. Commanded an infantry headquarters company and then I commanded two truck companies. I was Transportation Corps, basic branch. I reverted to basic branch in Korea, and they gave me command of two different truck companies at that time.

Wright: What did you train for in your training?

Royals: Infantry, how to fight a war. Basic training was infantry. Eventually when I came back from Okinawa I went to a transportation school, to learn more about Transportation Corps.

Wright: Moving slightly back, towards your training, was your experience good with training, or was it really hard?

Royals: Oh yeah, it was thorough. It was hard, but it was thorough. I was young like you then, I could put in long days and didn't need extra sleep like I do today. No exams [both laugh].

Wright: Were you there with any friends from college, or anyone you knew?

Royals: All new experiences.

Wright: Did you make friends there that would last a long time?

Royals: Oh yeah, very transient. I have a few friends I have made over the years that have been longtime friends, but back then, being an officer, a company may have had five or six officers, you were friendly with them. But then you moved on to another unit, they moved to a different unit, so you lost contact. I can say that I have only run into four Sigma Chis in the military.

ROTC like me, different places around the world so to speak. Running into Gettysburg people was pretty rare.

Wright: How did you maintain contact with your family during training? Were you still at home with them and commuting?

Royals: Oh yeah. Training you lived with your family and went in everyday to train.

Wright: How long did you say that your training lasted?

Royals: It depended on what type of courses. Anywhere from three to six months was usually career type training. Then you would have little intermediate-type courses, like chemical and biological warfare training was two weeks. That was back in the '50s. It was pretty basic. We were still thinking of Hiroshima and Nagasaki back then. Kids in those days, in school, would have desk drills where they would get under the tables, because they were going to be nuked or something. That was the mindset back in the 50s.

Wright: Yeah. Were you raised with a military mindset or was your family completely non-military?

Royals: No, none whatsoever.

Wright: How did your family react to you joining?

Royals: My dad was a little upset. We made a decision to stay in the service in '56, after we had come back from Okinawa and I trained at Fort Eustis in transportation.<sup>11</sup> We made the decision because I wanted to go learn how to fly. We made the decision to stay in and I went to Army Flight Training.

Wright: Why was he upset?

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<sup>11</sup> Fort Eustis is an Army Installation in Virginia.

Royals: He wanted me to take his business over. He had taken the business over in New York, and like I said he commuted every day for forty some years, took a train from Teaneck to Weehawken, New Jersey. He took the ferry across the river to downtown New York, and he would walk to his office on Broad Street, which is right near Wall Street. It's about a block and a half away from Wall Street. That's where I had worked in my teens, that office. My father was one of the first residents of World Trade One, when it was built. They moved the office over to the World Trade, and I had been in the World Trade visiting him at his office complex, but you know he is long passed before 9/11. He was disappointed I didn't want to come into the business, because I wanted to fly and have fun.

Wright: Was it a hard choice, to pursue the next step of your military career?

Royals: No, once I made the commitment, that was it. My wife and I decided, that's what we'll do for our lifetime.

Wright: OK, so training is over, and you are ready for Korea. What does that process look like, as far as flying over and getting situated?

Royals: Get on an airplane out on the West Coast and you fly over, stop in Japan for two days. Processed in Japan, Camp Zama, was the headquarters in Japan. Where did we go? We flew into Busan, took a train all the way up north to the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, all the way to the demarcation line between North and South. Ended up there in the 7<sup>th</sup> Division.

Wright: Were you immediately thrust into combat?

Royals: No, that was during the truce time. We had casualties due to landmines and incursions, but other than that there was no active fighting.

Wright: Were you ever there for any active fighting in Korea?

Royals: No, not actual, just incursions.

Wright: OK, so how long were you there for in Korea?

Royals: One year in Korea. And one year in Okinawa, and back to the states in '55 or '56.

Wright: So your overall Korean experience seems like it wasn't that bad, you didn't see any combat.

Royals: No, it wasn't that bad. I had good jobs, hence I didn't get exposed like some of the people did.

Wright: So you were an infantryman?

Royals: Infantry Company Commander of a headquarters company, and Company Commander of a truck company. Which had sixty vehicles or so. We did all sorts of movement of everything, all around Korea.

Wright: What was it like leading all those men?

Royals: It was fine. They usually say a good Sergeant is worth ten men, at least. If you found the good ones, you used them and let them have free reign, but you had confidence in them. It's called a leadership technique, that's the way you work with people.

Wright: Would you say that you were a natural-born leader, or that it developed over time?

Royals: Kind of I think from sports. I was captain of the soccer team here and all that. I was captain of my high school team.

Wright: So your sports experience kind of shaped –

Royals: Oh yeah, dealing with people.

Wright: Would you say that you were much better equipped for this job because of your sports experience?

Royals: Sports experience and college experience actually. Exposure to the World War II veterans gave you a good insight as to what to expect with military.

Wright: From your time as a Sig Chi, did you gain any leadership experience there?

Royals: Not really. When you were in sports, you're pretty much dedicated to that.

Wright: Were there any standout stories from your one year in Korea?

Royals: Not really.

Wright: It was mostly just boring stuff?

Royals: One thing I did that was kind of unusual, we were moving what was called a regiment of South Korean troops from one part of the country, the west coast, to almost over to the east coast, because they were repositioning them along the demilitarized zone. I commanded 300 trucks to go across the country with these Korean troops, and all their equipment and everything else. That was kind of an interesting convoy of 300. We had military police along the way to close off access traffic, but it was a long haul [laughs]. But that was probably the most interesting and challenging thing I did. We only lost one truck, due to an accident, and that was pretty good out of 300, I thought.

Wright: Would you ever work closely with any South Vietnamese –

Royals: South Vietnamese, or South Koreans?

Wright: Sorry, South Korean soldiers?

Royals: Not really. When we moved them, their Regimental Commander rode in my jeep with me. He was a full Colonel then.

Wright: What was that experience like riding with the Colonel?

Royals: Just fine. He was interested. When he was concerned he asked questions.

Wright: Could he speak English?

Royals: No, through a translator. We had a translator with us. He would ask a question about why do we go this way or that way. He was just interested in getting from here to there. I dealt

mainly with the U.S. military all the time. Although, in the infantry our regiment had the Ethiopian battalion attached to us. That was United Nations Forces. Hence we called them the Eeks. Ethiopians, one of the divisions had the Turkish brigade, one of the others had the Thai battalion. Different units had different foreign countries attached to them. The Ethiopians, I got to know one or two of them, they were a company really. Haile Selassie was the emperor of Ethiopia at that time, back from the 30s, 40s, 50s. They were one of the Honor Companies of Haile Selassie, and he would rotate a company every year or two to Korea to fight. And the Ethiopians, one of the guys I got to know pretty well, would take me to his tent, and he would show me his prize. His prize was a chain, like a dog tag chain if you've seen them, and he'd have ears on it, cut off ears. When he killed a Chinaman, they'd cut off his ear to show that he's a warrior.

Wright: Wow. That's dark.

Royals: He would keep them, he had twenty some ears. The Ethiopians, the Chinese never wanted to attack them. And when they did, they got slaughtered. Ethiopians would go on the front slope of a hill, and the Chinese would try and come up the hill in mass, and the Ethiopians, they would be black in color, dark, and they would be in the ground in their holes, and they would come up and slaughter the Chinese, and they would go out and cut the ears off.

Wright: Good lord.

Royals: But that was an interesting story, that's my Eek experience in Korea. Getting to know this guy, he was a counterpart as a Company Commander, as I was.

Wright: Could he speak English?

Royals: Oh yeah, very good English. He was taught the King's English.

Wright: Do you know how he learned that?

Royals: His schooling, in Ethiopia, and being in the military, and being an officer in the honor guard, they had certain prestige within the country.

Wright: So he had fought?

Royals: Yeah he was there. He was ending up his tour.

Wright: So he was there before the –

Royals: He was during the actual conflict.

Wright: And then you came shortly after?

Royals: I came after that, yeah.

Wright: How did you end up staying for the one year in Okinawa. You were told to go there?

Royals: I was in a boat company over there, an Executive Officer of a boat company. We had twenty some vessels that were in harbor of Naha [capital of the Okinawa prefecture], which was the main harbor in that time, at Okinawa. Our ships ocean going vessels would come in there, with cargo, back and forth. You know, Okinawa was the fortification type, because the Chinese were trying to take Formosa, and they were making overtures to take Formosa, and that [Okinawa] was our base close to Formosa and China.<sup>12</sup> We had an Air Force Base there, and the Marines were at the far end of the island, the Army had a regiment there. We were hoping the Chinese wouldn't try to invade Formosa because we were going to defend Formosa, because Chiang Kai-Shek was there at the time, as the premier of Taiwan.<sup>13</sup> When he evacuated the mainland, Mao Zedong took over and Chiang Kai-Shek went to Formosa and formed the Nationalist Chinese Government, and that was back in about '48 or '49.<sup>14</sup> China was always

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<sup>12</sup> Formosa is modern day Taiwan.

<sup>13</sup> Chiang Kai-Shek was the ruler of China before being forced into exile.

<sup>14</sup> Mao Zedong was the Communist ruler of China from 1949-1976.

threatening to take the island, so Okinawa was a featured base for our forces to hope to deter it. And the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet was out there running up and down the straits in the water.

Wright: OK, just to clarify, how did you make the transition from being a Captain in the infantry to being a boat person.

Royals: Well, I was a Lieutenant in the infantry, and the Lieutenant was the truck company commander at the time, and the Lieutenant in the boat company. I had a Captain, who was my boss in the Boat Company. You learn by your NCOs. They teach you.

Wright: So you just gradually learned –

Royals: You learn on the job training. That's basically the military, it has a lot of OJT.

Wright: On the job training?

Royals: Yep, that's a big cliché in the military. You learn by doing, and you hopefully get a good Sergeant to teach you, make decisions and hopefully he points you in the right direction.

Wright: While you were staying in Okinawa with your family you were also working as the Boat Captain?

Royals: Well I was the Executive Officer of the Company, we had many boats

Wright: Excuse me, not as the Boat Captain, but as the –

Royals: You know, running the everyday business of taking care of twenty some different types of boats. We had a variety of boats. Small craft.

Wright: What was the age of your kids when you were staying with you in Okinawa?

Royals: Okinawa? One, two, and three. My son came over when he was nine months old. My daughter was a year old when they came to Okinawa in March of '55.

Wright: Do they remember much of that time?

Royals: No, no. We have pictures of them, and that's about it.

Wright: How did your wife like the stay?

Royals: She enjoyed Okinawa. She enjoyed the difference of the culture. She ended up teaching. They had, they called it USAFE.<sup>15</sup> It was the United Services Education Program for people in the military who didn't have high school degrees. She ended up teaching that in Okinawa, and she enjoyed doing that. We had a full time maid, Okinawan, which took care of the kids when we were out of the house, cleaned. Wife did the cooking, she didn't cook. You had a live-in maid.

Wright: And were you living on a base there?

Royals: Yeah we had a place called Masha Nada Naha, was a housing area, and there were houses that had been there. They were Japanese built houses, when the Japanese were on Okinawa. Of course that was their island, they owned it as part of the greater Empire of Japan. These were houses that we moved into.

Wright: Were you there with other people that you knew from Korea?

Royals: No.

Wright: So there was no one you knew?

Royals: No, whole new environment. That's the way the military is almost all the time. You move into a unit, and if you knew one person you were lucky. I can't, other than later on in my career, say that I moved into a unit, in my early career, with people I knew.

Wright: OK. When did you leave Okinawa?

Royals: Left Okinawa in December or January of....December '55 I guess it was, or January '56.

Wright: So after that what is the next step?

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<sup>15</sup> USAFE stands for United States Armed Forces Education, and was for service members who did not have a high school education.

Royals: I went to school at Fort Eustis, graduated there and went to flight training in November '57. I had a tour at Fort Eustis first. I was in a Terminal Service Battalion, which is basically people unloading and loading cargo on ships.

Wright: And you mentioned that was a school. What were you learning there?

Royals: Transportation, how you document things, how you run different transportation units, how you ship things.

Wright: And was that a natural follow-up to your work in Korea?

Royals: That would have been training because that was my basic branch of service.

Wright: And then you moved to the Air Force.

Royals: Moved to Army Aviation Training, not Air Force. Army Aviation Training is completely different.

Wright: What is the difference there?

Royals: United States Air Force is a separate branch of service. United States Army has Arm Aviation. Helicopters, small fixed-wing airplanes. Air Force has the big ones and the jets. And the army is completely separate from the Air Force, the Air Force was created in 1948. And at that point in time the Army Aviation kept the smaller machines. We didn't have helicopters other than a trial basis back then. In the 40s. World War II produced a few helicopters, but very archaic.

Wright: What inspired you to join the Army Aviation?

Royals: I just thought it was a great way to go. Good challenge.

Wright: How long was the process to learn how to fly?

Royals: I went to San Marcus, Texas. Southwest Texas State College is located in San Marcus, it was an old airbase from World War II, where did our basic training on fixed-winged airplanes.

San Marcus, with Southwest Texas, is the college President Lyndon Johnson went to. He graduated from Southwest Texas. There was a little tie to government there. San Marcus was an airbase, the army took it over, and they taught us how to fly airplanes for about five months. Then we moved to Fort Rucker, Alabama, for the advanced fixed-wing training, which was tactical flying of the airplanes. And in February '58 I got my Aviation Wings, meaning I was qualified in the eyes of the army to fly.

Wright: So you learned how to fly planes there?

Royals: Fixed-wings.

Wright: What is a fixed-wing?

Royals: Small, do you know Cessna? Do you what a Cessna is?

Wright: No.

Royals: Single-engine airplane. Small. Very rugged type aircraft. We learned in Cessna, what they call the L19, but if you're not familiar with fixed-wing aircraft then it's a little hard to define for you. And from there we went to Camp Walters, Texas. Camp Walters is outside Fort Worth, Texas. Fort Walters was the helicopter Army training base. I learned to fly helicopters there.

Wright: And that is what you ended up doing, correct?

Royals: Well, I ended up flying both. Anyway, we learned to fly helicopters, and you could already fly, you were a certified pilot, so to speak. But to learn to fly a helicopter was a very interesting experience.

Wright: Was it harder than the fixed-wings?

Royals: Much harder, cause you have to concentrate on using all four limbs, both hands and both legs. The first time I was taken out by what they call an instructor pilot in a helicopter, he took

me to a big field and flew me out there, because I had never flown in a helicopter, and he says, "OK you've got it." And so I'm trying to sit there with, [motioning with his hands] this is called a collective pitch, this is the cyclic, and you have two pedals. He says, "You've got it." I was all over that cornfield, with him right there not letting us do anything real bad. First experience I could have wiped out everybody and everything in sight. Completely new compared to flying the old fixed-wings. So I went through that training.

Wright: And that was in '57, '58?

Royals: That was in '58, February through April. February, March, April.

Wright: And what is the process where you end up going to Vietnam.

Royals: Well, we're talking '58, I first went to Vietnam in '66. So I had flying assignments in between there.

Wright: So you did flight school in '58, and Vietnam in '66?

Royals: Well, I went to Fort Riley, and from Fort Riley back to Fort Eustis four years, then Panama Canal Zone, then back to Hurst, Texas to Bell Helicopter, then to St. Louis, which was the Aviation Command, and that's where I volunteered to go to Vietnam in '66.

Wright: So through the eight years in between you just did lots of flying jobs.

Royals: Lots of flying time, couple thousand hours. South America was a very interesting experience.

Wright: You said that you spent 22 years in the military?

Royals: 26, Tom [Gearey] was 22.

Wright: Alright, so now we're at Vietnam.

Royals: OK, I was in St. Louis, and I worked for a jerk.

Wright: A jerk?

Royals: He was. He was a drinker, not a very good officer, but I had to work for him, I was a Major at the time, he was Lieutenant Colonel, and I had a friend who worked in Washington, who did assignments. I told him, his name was Orlie Gonzalez, I said, "Orlie, I got to get out of here," and he said, "I agree." He offered me command of two companies that were getting ready to go to Vietnam. One was at Fort Camel, Kentucky, and the other was at Fort Riley, Kansas. I had been at Fort Riley back in the '58, '59 area, flying helicopters out there. So I said I'd go to Fort Riley. So I activated, which means that there was nothing there, a company, which was aircraft maintenance. Which means you repair them, fix them, and stuff like that. So I activated, trained it, that was October '65, and then in February '66, we got on a ship in Oakland and went to Vietnam. My company of three-hundred-and-some guys. Trained, ready to go to war, so to speak.

Wright: What was it like landing in Vietnam?

Royals: Well, we landed in a place called Vũng Tàu, on a big ship, and we got put ashore. Then we got on board a couple Air Force Transport Aircraft and flew us to a place called Phu Loi, which is north of Saigon, about twenty kilometers. It was an airfield strip that the army had some aviation there already. We were gonna be the maintenance company at that particular facility, and all our equipment had been shipped out from Galveston to Saigon. The big boats could go up the Saigon river. It is a very navigable river, and our equipment got shipped over by boat, and two or three of my officers and about eight or ten of my men went on the boat with our equipment, and then got it up to Phu Loi, those twenty kilometers up the road from Saigon area. The port area. We married up with our equipment and then started training on site, in support of the aviation units there. I left that company, because they have what they call a D.E.R.O.S., Days Expected Return to Continental United States. Rotation of people, and they took people and put

them into different units and brought different people into the units, to spread out so a unit wouldn't close down all at once. I lost the unit at that time.

Wright: So your unit went in to fill in for the unit that was leaving?

Royals: No, my unit went in as a new unit. And they filled us with people who had been there for maybe three months, six months, nine months, and took people out of my unit and put them in the units where they took the people from. Similar jobs, skills, exchanged. But that was to spread out the return to the United States, so you didn't lose everybody at once. That's what they called it. I ended up on a Battalion Staff for about three months, and they gave me another company, which was an Aircraft Maintenance Company in the Saigon area. Big heliport in Saigon, at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base, one of the two primary Air Force bases in that area of Saigon at the time. Our job was to fix helicopters and fixed-wings that got shot down and destroyed, or damaged. And repair the maintenance ones that needed repair, as well as fixed-wing. We had both requirements...helicopters, back in '66, '67, which was my first tour, we probably had about 3,000 helicopters in the country. My tour in '70 we had about 6,000 helicopters in the country.

Wright: So you were leading a maintenance unit. Was that for the entire duration of your time there?

Royals: Yes. From that time till February '67. I took command in July '66. Seven months later, or eight months later, I left and came back to the United States.

Wright: So you were only in Vietnam for one year?

Royals: One year.

Wright: OK, so one total year. And part of that time was training?

Royals: No, no training. We went right to work when we got there, because of the way they infused other people that had been there.

Wright: But was it a training of sort, in that you were learning on the job?

Royals: Not really, our people were trained. When we were at Fort Riley for those four or five months, we brought people in to train my men how to fix things, how to tear down an engine, how to repair rotor systems, how to do things on the machines. And they were trained on equipment, but not in the combat zone. Then they got to the combat zone and got the experience of seeing helicopters that were shot up.

Wright: OK. Roughly how many men were assigned to you?

Royals: About 320 I think was the company size. Had about eight or ten officers.

Wright: Would you as the commander delegate to the officers, who would then delegate to the broader group.

Royals: Yeah, they had assignments. There was a Shop Officer, there was a Fixed-Wing Officer, there was a Rotary-Wing Officer, there was a Supply Officer, a Tech-Service Officer, Executive Officer, who was my alter-ego so to speak, and I guess I had five officers who could fly, who were pilots. The other ones were not flyers, they were in technical fields. Supply and stuff like that.

Wright: What was your relationship with your officers like?

Royals: It was good. We had a great deployment unit, when we left I still stayed in touch with two of them, the ones who went over in '66, '67. Most of them were career [military]. Quite a few of them passed on. We did interesting things. Recovery was one of our requirements. We would get a call in my operations radio. They would say, "There's a helicopter down," at such and such coordinates, they would tell you on a map where it was, you could look and find it. So

you'd jump in your helicopter, we had recovery equipment. My helicopter crew normally was four people but when you did recovery you took a couple extra people along to do the work on the ground, to get the helicopter ready to get recovered. Or the fixed-wing, we did some fixed-wing. Mainly helicopters. But we got this call one evening at 5:00, and it said, "There's a helicopter down and you need to go get it." So we'd crank up our helicopter, and then it was a twenty, twenty-five minute flight, and we got to the area where the helicopter was down, called on the radio to the ground, where the people were with it. They told us how to come in and land, to avoid fire, hopefully. You got some fire occasionally from the enemy. You'd land and get out, see the guy in charge there, ended up they had eight helicopters shot down in that one area out of the twenty that made the insertion. Put ground troops on the ground, probably 120 men at a time, with twenty helicopters. And they got shot up pretty bad, and they were in a constant firefight off to the perimeters. So it was getting dark, and the commander on the ground was a Major I had known in the past, because he had taught at one of the schools I went to, he was an armored officer, taught armored tactics and I had known him, golly, back in '60 I guess. Hadn't seen him since, and he was in charge of that. It was his helicopter unit that was shot down. We decided, it's getting dark, and to recover a helicopter, do you know what a Chinook is?

Wright: Uh, vaguely.

Royals: That's a Chinook [shows Wright a picture from his picture book]. The big one, it's still flying in Afghanistan. That's what a rig would look like. Those are my guys out here, hooking it up to the Chinook [still showing Wright pictures from his collection].

Wright: When one of these helicopters would go down, was it generally 100% casualties?

Royals: No, not necessarily. That one went down in a rice patty [shows a picture in the book], the guys got out OK, and they secured the area, hopefully from the enemy. It wasn't necessarily

shot down, it could have been engine failure. Anyway this commander on the ground [getting back to the story about the eight helicopters out of twenty being shot down], he and I decided we'd make one lift that night, and we went back the next morning and got the next seven out under fire. He stayed in the zone overnight, he ended up getting a Distinguished Service Cross for that staying there, and setting up perimeter and defending the zone. He ended up making Major General. I'd followed his career but I had only seen him once since school, I saw him in that landing zone there.

Wright: Oh wow, that's really cool.

Royals: And I saw him one more time, when he was General. Three times in twenty or thirty years. Anyway, we got all eight choppers out of there, and got them back to fix them or salvage them.

Wright: What was the protocol with dealing with people who were either killed or injured in the crash?

Royals: Well the protocol was, whoever had a helicopter flyable, if you had wounded, you would take them back to medical evacuation. The real protocol is every aircraft has a guard channel, which is a channel that is open to all aircraft. If somebody had wounded on the ground somewhere, and you happened to be in the area, you'd get a call on the radio, saying, "This is such-and-such located here and there, Huey flying south to north, something, please come in, we've got wounded, need Evac." So you'd duck down if you weren't doing something that was required to be done, you'd jump down and pick up a wounded and take them to an Evac hospital. That was the protocol, if you had nothing that you were committed to, that you had to do, then you'd go get the wounded and bring them to a Medivac. Dead, you would go into a landing zone where they'd have body bags, they'd call them, big sleeping bag sacks they would put the dead

bodies in, and you'd haul them to one of the mortuary hospitals. They had hospital staff who would take the bodies and make sure they were gone and everything. Then they would do the work they had to do for the casualty.

Wright: When your unit would fly in, was there generally an amount of shots fired from the Vietnamese soldiers.

Royals: Well, you never knew, cause the Vietcong mainly was our adversary at that point in time. They'd be in little spider holes, we call them fox holes in our military, but they would be in the ground and they'd be camouflaged, and you would never know they were there, until they decided to pop up and take a shot. We used to always wonder about the "One-Shot Charlies," we'd call them, because we called the VC the Charlies. They would pop out and shoot at you, and sometimes if you were flying fairly low, you might come back and find a bullet hole in your fuselage, fortunately not hitting the main elements that would cause you to crash. You just never knew where they were. That's what happened to this unit that went in there and lost their eight helicopters. They landed right on top of an enemy encampment, cause you couldn't see them.

Wright: Do you know how the soldiers fared, who were dropped off in the twenty helicopter unit?

Royals: Well, they went into a perimeter defense, around the area and I think they brought in one more lift of probably another sixty guys, but they secured the area, in the sense that, they'd set up around the helicopters for the day and night, they spent the night there until the next morning when we could get back in. Reason we didn't do it at night is the big Chinook helicopter [is a], huge target. Losing one of them was very, very costly at that point in time, as far as they had four or five men on board, and you never knew what was gonna happen when you got shot down. We didn't want to risk losing them

Wright: Did the night flying make you a larger target?

Royals: It made you a very vulnerable target. You were in the sky, you were noisy, and your engine had an exhaust flame, and you were very visible to the enemy. At night time, the enemy could pick up on you. That was exposure that just wasn't worth the risk, to lose one or two of those big ones and their crews.

Wright: Was there a sense of dread as you would fly in and not know where – [the Vietcong were]?

Royals: You pay attention to what you're doing is what you do. You watch very carefully, you look around all the time. Our crew on the Huey that we flew all the time was four people, myself, the pilot, and two door-gunners with sixty-caliber machine guns. If there was hostile fire, our machine gunners would fire at them, keep their heads down so we could get in and out.

Wright: Did your unit often have people hurt or killed?

Royals: Nope, I was very fortunate. Two tours, I commanded a battalion the second tour, I had seven individual units within it, and I only had one man wounded in both tours.

Wright: Wow, that's impressive.

Royals: He got wounded in a landing zone rigging a helicopter, a Charlie took a one-shot at him, and got him in the upper-arm, fortunately. It's the only man I had wounded. Now, the guys, on the grounds fighting in the infantry, they had many, many, many casualties.

Wright: Was it normal for the recovery units to not have many casualties?

Royals: I was just very fortunate. We lucked out, let's put it that way. I know one or two of the recovery helicopters early in the war, probably in '55, '56 probably did get shot down. We were very fortunate. Just lucked out.

Wright: Do you think that your leadership played a role in that?

Royals: Probably. A couple of the guys that I commanded, I still hear from two or three of them, put them in landing zone, they'd rig the helicopter, I would climb up on top of it, exposed all the time into enemy fire, if a guy wanted to jump up and shoot at em –

Wright: You or them [in regards to being shot at]?

Royals: Shoot at them. They could shoot at us too, of course, we were on the ground.

Wright: Who was standing on top of the chopper?

Royals: My maintenance guys, riggers. [Goes off on a side story about one of the guys he knew during the war].

Wright: It really seems like you've met a lot of really fascinating people.

Royals: I have, I've been lucky. Did some interesting things. Do you know Barbara Eden, *I Dream of Jeannie*?

Wright: Nope.

Royals: You missed a good looking girl. I met her at President Nixon's Inauguration in '69.

Wright: You were there for that?

Royals: I was the escort of the Governor of New Jersey. Dick [Richard J.] Hughes was the Governor of New Jersey. He came down for the inauguration. He picked military officers to escort one of the governors. I was from New Jersey originally, so he asked me if I would escort him, so I spent a week with him.

Wright: Was that still during the war?

Royals: That was '69, in Washington.

Wright: Were you permanently back in the States at that point?

Royals: I was back then. This was '69, I was stationed in Washington at the time. They picked me as a representative to escort the governor to the ceremonies. We rode in the Inaugural Parade

#3, because we're the third State in the Union, behind Pennsylvania, and the first State of course. Anyway, I got to meet the governor, and I got to meet Jeannie at the Presidential Inauguration Ball. My wife and I went to the ball. That was high mark for me, to meet Barbara Eden. Good looking broad, good looking gal. But anyway, came back from 'Nam to St. Louis again, worked for the General that was in charge of the Aviation Logistics, and Command was in St. Louis at that time. It's now down in Redstone Arsenal, Alabama. I worked for the General there, then went to the Commanding General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, then to my assignment in Washington. Then in December '69 I volunteered to go back to Vietnam again, and commanded a battalion for six months, then after that I became G4 and Chief of Staff of the Aviation Brigade, and that's where we had the six hundred helicopters. And the Chief of Staff got me all over the country. I got to see everything.

Wright: In Vietnam or the States?

Royals: In Vietnam, in 1970 I was there the whole year, in Vietnam.

Wright: Just to go back a little bit and parse through some of that, you leave Vietnam for the first time –

Royals: February '67.

Wright: And then you head back to the States?

Royals: Went to St. Louis.

Wright: And then you were an officer there?

Royals: Oh yeah, I was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in St. Louis, worked for the General, and then I went to the Armed Forces Command General Staff College for nine months, in Fort Leavenworth. Then I went to the Pentagon from there in Washington, and worked there for eighteen months roughly, and that's where I did the Barbara Eden thing.

Wright: OK, so when and how did you decide to go back to Vietnam?

Royals: Aviators were getting two or three tours in Vietnam, and I worked in the office that assigned all the aviators worldwide at that time. All the Army aviators.... Aviators were going back to Vietnam because they needed them to fly. We just couldn't support with new training base people enough aviators. Recognizing my turn was coming up, I volunteered and went back. That was all of 1969, late in '70.

Wright: And you said that you were there for –

Royals: One year.

Wright: And that was what, three collective years? One in Korea, and two total in Vietnam?

Royals: Yeah. And I had four in Panama!

Wright: When was that?

Royals: '60 to '64, canal zone in Panama, South America. I made sixteen countries.

Wright: Wow, you have such a broad career.

Royals: I have had a very interesting life. I did, really. I did a lot of fun things.

Wright: Yeah. So your second tour in Vietnam, were there any primary differences, that you would say, between the first and second?

Royals: Many, many more troops, many more units were in Vietnam at that time.

Wright: So it was much more scaled up?

Royals: It had built up significantly, three new divisions, which is fifteen or twenty thousand men, each, in different parts of the country.

Wright: And was your job different this time around, or the same?

Royals: Well, I commanded seven units, which was like the unit I commanded the first time. Aircraft Maintenance.

Wright: So your first time you only had one unit?

Royals: One unit, three hundred and some men.

Wright: And then your second time you had seven units?

Royals: Second time I had seven units under my control, but they had commanders like I was the first time.

Wright: So you were a much bigger –

Royals: Yeah, I was a bigger cheese then.

Wright: You were a big shot.

Royals: I was Lieutenant Colonel then. And then six months of that commanding those seven units, and then the last six months I was on what they called the Brigade, which commanded all of the Aviation units except those within the Divisions. We had, probably, fourteen or sixteen thousand pilots. At that time.

Wright: When you were the Lieutenant Colonel, were you still flying in?

Royals: Oh yeah.

Wright: On missions?

Royals: I didn't fly into landing zones, though. I didn't make recoveries. My seven units did that. I was above them.

Wright: Were you less in combat, this time around?

Royals: Really, yeah. I don't think I ever got shot at the second time. I may have, but you never knew it.

Wright: You're there for a year, and the first half you were the Battalion Commander. And the next half you were part of the Brigade?

Royals: First Aviation Brigade.

Wright: Could you expand on that?

Royals: Yeah, Aviation Brigade, they had about six thousand helicopters and about a thousand fixed-winged airplanes army. They were scattered from one end of Vietnam to the other, up and down the country. We had, under the Brigade, four different Groups. Groups had Battalions in them. Groups were commanded by full Colonels, Battalions by Lieutenant Colonels, and they just supported the whole country.

Wright: And were you just generally at the top of the food chain here?

Royals: Well, yeah we were at the pinnacle of it, and we oversaw what they did, and how they did it. Second tour General [Creighton] Abrams was there, Four Star General in Command, first tour was [William] Westmoreland, four stars. But Abrams was the General, and my Brigade Commander would report to him....

Wright: Did you feel that you personally had a pretty big effect on things in Vietnam?

Royals: To some degree, but I was one of many.

Wright: You weren't really making that many big decisions, right?

Royals: I didn't have hands on with people, my boss made hands on decisions. I, as Chief of Staff, I'd reinforce him, and do as appropriate. I had to relieve a Company Commander, who screwed up big time, stuff like that. I did what the boss told me, and the boss reported to the big boss, who was General Abrams, running all of Vietnam.

Wright: So what happens after this tour?

Royals: After the tour I came back and worked for the Secretary of the Army.

Wright: For how long?

Royals: Eighteen months. I was in the Pentagon again, but working for the Secretary of the Army. I was his Aviation Advisor, and after eighteen months I went to the Industrial College,

which was like the Army War College in Carlisle, the same level, but it's a "grooming school." It was at Fort McNair, which was in Washington. All services would attend that one. Army, Navy, Air Force, and civilians, high-level civilians, were there. Went through that, and that was twelve months. It was like a master's degree program, that's what it's like. For the army. Leavenworth being an undergraduate degree, that's a stepping stone as a Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and the stepping stone as a Colonel was ICAF.<sup>16</sup>

Wright: Remind me, what was Leavenworth?

Royals: Leavenworth was the Command and General Staff School, kind of Major, Lieutenant Colonel-ish.

Wright: And was that prior to your second tour?

Royals: That was before second tour. I went from there to Washington for Aviation Assignments, then Aviation back to Vietnam, and then back to the Secretary of the Army Staff. And then Sec Army. After ICAF I went to procurement, in the Army Material Command, I worked in the Procurement and Production, we had a 22 billion dollar budget that we oversaw for the military procurements, and then I retired from that.

Wright: You retired after procurements?

Royals: After 26 years.

Wright: OK. One thing we haven't really checked in on is your family.

Royals: My family moved with me everywhere except for Vietnam and Korea.

Wright: OK, so we are in Okinawa.

Royals: Okinawa, Naha.

Wright: Then back to the states.

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<sup>16</sup> ICAF is Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

Royals: Fort Eustis

Wright: Then they follow you all around?

Royals: We left flight school, flight school went in there. Then Fort Riley, back to Fort Eustis, then down to Panama for four years.... [Wright and Royals speak for two minutes about his kids and what they did with their lives].

Wright: What was your wife's reaction to your decision to go back to Korea for the second time?

Royals: She knew it had to be. She was very involved. In Panama she ran a nursing school for three out of the four years, at the Navy base. She has taught. She was a professional Girl Scout worker, ran Girl Scout troupes and things like that. She was a National Officer on her sorority which we don't have here anymore, Phi Mu. Phi Mu left in the 60s, but she was a National Officer. She was a Gamma area coordinator, which means she had seven states with chapters to oversee. She did that for about ten years. She was very involved in her Greek life and everything. She had things she did, she was very good at running women's club, she was president of the Newcomers club in Gettysburg. President of the Lake Heritage Women's Club where we lived. She passed on seven years ago.

Wright: Oh, I'm sorry about that.

Royals: We lost one daughter to Breast Cancer at the age 52, and we lost an infant son at one year, eleven days, back in the 50s. They said Crib Death, back in the 50s they couldn't do all the research work they do today.

Wright: Alright. Well, I think we are at the hour and a half mark. We have gotten you through college, through Korea, through Vietnam, and we got you through your life back in the states right after it. You served 26 years. One thing I didn't realize, on my sheet here it says, "Gerald Royals, Helicopter pilot in Vietnam." That certainly did not give the full story of your life.

Royals: Well I have the full spectrum of 26 years. When I retired I went into teaching and coaching.

Wright: Sports?

Royals: Yeah sports. At high school, in Northern Virginia, not the same school my daughters at. West Springfield is where I was. They about 2,600 hundred kids in the school, 9-12. What do you think I coached?

Wright: My guy says basketball.

Royals: Nope...women's gymnastics.

Wright: Huh, how did that happen?

Royals: When I was in Vietnam, second tour, my wife wrote me a letter, you know we didn't have phones where you could call the world. She said, "Vicky," my daughter who's deceased, "Would like a balance beam." So I wrote back to my wife and said, "Well what's a balance beam?" She explained what it was, so of course we bought the balance beam while I was over there. I came back, knew nothing about it, and watched her practice. She was in probably Seventh grade then. Her coach, after I was there once or twice, said, "You need to learn more about this sport. Come on and learn to spot." So I went on and learned with her coach, this was '71 or '72. Thirty years later I retired from judging, coaching, and teaching women's gymnastics. It was a good career, I'm still in touch with some of them. I've got girls that are forty some years old that I still stay in touch with. They have families, kids in college, stuff like that. It was a very fun career.

Wright: That is one more facet on a very broad and diverse life.

Royals: Yeah, I've done a lot of fun things.

Wright: I'd agree.

Royals: I've enjoyed all of them just about, except for working for a few jerks occasionally.

There's ways to get around them. You'll find out as you go down your road. You're gonna find people that you say, "Oh my god, why this person." Pick the brains of the guys you like and follow their leadership. Try to ignore the others as best you can.

Wright: And I think that is about a good a place to stop as ever.