

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

RANDY BRINKLEY
INTERVIEWED BY RICH DINKEL
15 JANUARY 1998

DINKEL: This is Rich Dinkel on 15 January 1998, for an interview with Randy Brinkley, the Space Station Program manager. We are just recently airborne out of Happy Valley, Goose Bay, Labrador, on our way to Keflavik, Iceland, on our way to Moscow for the FGB roll-out.

Mr. Brinkley, why don't we start with your birth and early years, family composition, high school, sports, things like that. Why don't you tell me about some of that.

BRINKLEY: I'll try to keep it short, Rich. I was born in western North Carolina in September of 1944. I grew up in western North Carolina, a very average kid. Played sports. My favorite sport was football. Graduated from high school, small town in western North Carolina. I went to the University of North Carolina, where I also played football and got a degree there from the University of North Carolina.

After I graduated at the University of North Carolina, which at the time the nation was involved in the Vietnam conflict, I had applied and been accepted for law school, and initially planned on attending law school, but received a draft notice. At that point in time I decided that, one, I didn't want to go to law school, and, two, I didn't want to be drafted into the Army.

As it turned out, a well-dressed Marine captain by the name of Carl Mundy, who later was the Commandant of the Marine Corps, came on campus, and I decided to join the United States Marine Corps, at least go to the Officer Candidate School. That was in 1965.

The reason, I guess, as a little side note, that I was interested in the Marine Corps, because in my time at the University of North Carolina we spent a lot of time on the beach in the spring and the summer. The one thing I always remembered is, if you happened to run

across a Marine on the beach in an adversarial role, if you found yourself in an adversarial role with one Marine, you found yourself in an adversarial role with large numbers. I appreciated the fact that they stuck together. So that was probably one of the things that impressed me about the Marine Corps. I subsequently decided to join the Marine Corps and go to Officer Candidate School.

DINKEL: That's good, Randy. There was a couple of things in there that I didn't know, but I suspected all along. How about when you came in the Marine Corps? How did you get in? Tell me about your first days as an infantry officer.

BRINKLEY: Well, shortly after arriving in Quantico, Virginia, the first night in Officer Candidate School I asked myself, "What in the world have you done? How did you get yourself in this situation?"

As a little humor, my dad, who had been in the Army, suggested that if I got a haircut, which at that time I had very long hair, I would impress the drill instructors and they would probably be impressed and I wouldn't even have to get a haircut. Compared to looking like someone that had hair down to his back, I got what I considered to be an extreme haircut. It had no impact at Quantico and I found myself sixty seconds later with a shaved head, and that night in Quantico, actually in a state of shock, asking, "What in the world have I done?"

But having endured that and completing Officer Candidate School and being commissioned as second lieutenant, I went to The Basic School, at which [time] I applied for flight school and was accepted. I was convinced by my platoon commander that the only way you could really be a Marine was to be an infantry Marine, and that if you didn't have a bayonet in your teeth, then you weren't a Marine. So I tore my chit up and subsequently found myself in the infantry. As a footnote, a slow learner.

Then I ended up as a platoon commander on the East Coast and made a Mediterranean cruise. Then I was a general's aide. Then I got orders to Vietnam, like all of us did, after a very short period of time, and found myself at the ripe old age of twenty-two in Vietnam as a company commander along the demilitarized zone, participating in the battles of Con Thien and Khe Sanh and somehow surviving that.

I realized that I needed to adjust my career aspirations. I applied for flight school while I was in Vietnam, during the battle of Khe Sanh, and was subsequently approved for flight school, and left from Vietnam and went to flight school. At that time, the Marine Corps was killing pilots faster than the Navy could train them. As a result, I was one of the first Marines selected to go to the Air Force for flight training, which turned out to be somewhat of a shock for the Air Force and for me, because I arrived at Vance Air Force Base in Enid, Oklahoma, and found myself the senior student in class 7004. Much to the chagrin of the Air Force, I was made the class commander of that particular Air Force class.

It was an interesting time at Vance. Little did I ever realize that I would subsequently cross paths with and work with astronaut Joe Allen, who was the first mission specialist to undergo flight training as a civilian at Vance Air Force Base. He was two classes ahead of me. My next-door neighbor was Loren Shriver, who later was the shuttle commander and is now the Deputy...Director at KSC. I can remember one night, after a number of daiquiris, that Loren and I watched the landing on the moon, the first landing in 1969, while he and I were at Vance Air Force Base, he a plow-back instructor and myself as a student.

I finished after a year at Enid, Oklahoma, at Vance Air Force Base, received my Air Force wings, and I was subsequently returned to the Marine Corps to undergo follow-on transition training. After six months [at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS)] Cherry Point, flying familiarization in the A-4, and then later in the F-4 syllabus, on completion of the F-4 syllabus at VMFAT 201, I received my Navy wings and was subsequently assigned to

Marine Corps [Air] Station Beaufort, South Carolina, to MAG-32, in VMFA—that's 31 to a VMFAT Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312.

That actually happened because the Maintenance Officer at VMFAT 201 was Major Jack Hammond, who had called a friend of his at the time, Major Jim Mead, and suggested that I might be a good candidate as a new pilot to come to his squadron. I suppose there's probably one little footnote there for Jack, because I didn't start out in very high esteem with Major Hammond, because one Saturday morning I was flying a syllabus hop, which was a supersonic flight. We had received a brand-new F-4 from McDonnell-Douglas. The RIO [Radar Intercept Officer] that was with me had never gone to...Mach 2, and this was a quiet Saturday morning. So he was determined that we would go Mach 2. So instead of going the normal supersonic, we went to Mach 2.15. I was very pleased that I was going to get my Mach 2 pin.

I can recall landing and being in the hot refueling pits at Cherry Point, when this—we called him Mini-Maj, Hammond, stormed out of maintenance, shaking his fist at me. I couldn't figure out what had happened until we pulled into the line and shut down, and realized that we had gone so fast that we had burnt the paint off the radome of this brand new F-4. But over a period of time, Major Hammond saw some redeeming characteristics [in] me, and subsequently thought that I would be a good candidate to join his friend's squadron in Beaufort, South Carolina, VMFA-312.

DINKEL: That makes me think back [to] the Mini-Maj. The Mini-Maj thought the same thing about a lot of us, I think, as we went through at that time. But I won't tell my stories. Seems to me that I remember 312 being next door to the squadron I was on. I remember a story about arm-wrestling, its the first one that comes to mind. Do you recall anything about arm-wrestling at that time?

BRINKLEY: I guess you could say my arrival at Beaufort into Marine fighter aviation was somewhat colorful and, on occasion, embarrassing for me. I guess my reputation had preceded me. In a previous life when I was a Second Lieutenant at [The] Basic School, I had the misfortune of wrestling an orangutan and coming up on the short end of that. So when I first arrived, the squadron suggested that I was going to represent their squadron and wrestle an orangutan at Beaufort. I declined and said I would go back to the infantry before I was to get in the cage with another orangutan.

But shortly thereafter, the squadron offered me the opportunity to redeem myself, and that was to arm-wrestle the Executive Officer of our sister squadron, and that if I failed, I would embarrass the squadron and obviously be returned to the infantry. Fortunately for me, I was successful in not only beating the Executive Officer of our sister squadron, who had never been beaten before. Actually, I humiliated him. There's a saying that what goes around comes around. Because six months later I was transferred to that squadron and found myself standing in front of Major Wadsworth's desk, reporting aboard, after having humiliated him in front of his squadron and the rest of the squadrons in the Air Group. Fortunately, over a period of time, once again, like with Major Hammond, I was able to overcome my slow start and bad headwork.

DINKEL: I remember many portions of that, but I don't recall all the details. I think I remember, but I would like to hear from you, about exactly how the orangutan match turned out and how it transpired.

BRINKLEY: Well, we encountered a freak snowstorm in Quantico, Virginia, of such magnitude that they actually closed The Basic School. And as good Second Lieutenants with nothing to do, we headed to...[Washington, D.C.], found ourselves at Georgetown drinking beer and trying to impress a group of Georgetown law students who some of my friends had

known and who had played sports, particularly football, in their undergraduate days. This group of individuals in the last few days had gone to a carnival there in Georgetown, in which for five dollars one could enter a cage with a muzzled orangutan, and if they were successful in staying in the cage with the orangutan for five minutes, they were paid \$100. None of them were successful, and they were talking about this.

Of course, being Marine Second Lieutenants, there was no hill too tall or any obstacle that we couldn't overcome, so we felt obliged that we had to take on this challenge. After another several hours of strategy sessions and drinking beer in Old Town, we had devised a plan, and we launched off to encounter the orangutan.

Somewhere in the transit some changes were made, because, as I recall when we left, I was going to be number three on the sequence of events with the orangutan, but when we arrived, I found myself in the cage with the orangutan first. The orangutan looked docile enough, 110 pounds, long, skinny arms, who was sitting in the middle of this iron cage. I was pretty much full of myself and had already decided that I would wrestle this orangutan while two of my fellow Second Lieutenants were going to apply different strategies.

I approached the orangutan from the back side, and grabbed the orangutan in a half-nelson, and, much to my surprise and pleasure, I was offered no resistance. Encouraged by this situation, I made the mistake of lifting the orangutan off the ground. I can recall this big smile on my face as the Georgetown law students looked in awe and my fellow Second Lieutenants encouraged me on. This lasted probably for about fifteen seconds, and then I noticed that this long, skinny arm had reached up and had grabbed the iron bar over my head. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time, until about, oh, perhaps, ten seconds later I felt my feet leave the ground. I looked around and then just surmised that the orangutan, who weighed probably 100 pounds, and I weighed 230 at the time, had just done a one-arm pull-up with something like three times its body weight.

It was at this point in time that I realized that I was in deep and serious trouble, and this big grin on my face was changed to stark terror. I was no longer squeezing the orangutan, but actually holding on to the orangutan's back for fear of my life. Fortunately for me, this situation didn't last very long. The orangutan, while she held us in mid-air with one arm, reached around with this other long skinny arm and grabbed me from the back of my neck and slung me the length of the cage and, thank goodness, towards the door, [through] which I immediately took exit from the cage.

Now my fellow Marine Second Lieutenants first started laughing at me with my plight. But when I said, "All right. Now it's time for plan B and plan C," they indicated they had no intentions of executing plan B or C, or getting in the ring, or in this cage with the orangutan. I basically told them that I had been humiliated worse than at any time in my life, and there was nothing that they could do to me that the orangutan had not just done, and either they got in the cage or...we would have a physical confrontation [right there] on the spot.

Well, I'll try to summarize this. My follow-on, who was an All-American from [the] University of Texas, completely abandoned his well-thought-out approach, walked into the ring with the orangutan, and hit the orangutan between the eyes as hard as he could and then immediately retreated to the cage door. Fortunately for him, his one hit had stunned the orangutan, and he was able to, basically, with one hand on the door, stay the five minutes, and we won the \$100.

We returned to Quantico the next day. I was the laughingstock of our company. He was the hero. So once again, my career, I figured, was over in the Marine Corps. This situation was somewhat eased though, several days later when our sister company had sent some of their...less intelligent and more physically endowed individuals to demonstrate that their company could equal or exceed our capability. Not realizing this, I had come down to The Basic School [dining hall] for breakfast, and I looked across and saw one of the

lieutenants from our sister company, who I, at that time, felt, or thought, had encountered a terrible automobile wreck. The reason I did was because his nose was broken and plastered on one side of his face, both eyes were black, he was missing about six teeth, a number of stitches in his lips. I just commented at breakfast, I said, "My God, he must have been in a terrible accident."

I was sitting with one of my friends from OCS, who happened to be in his company, and he said, "Oh, no. He wasn't in an accident, not an automobile accident. He wrestled the orangutan last night."

As it turns out, this individual had represented the company, found out what was successful with my company, tried the same approach. Walked in, hit the orangutan as hard as he could, but this time it wasn't quite hard enough. The orangutan was knocked down, but then reached up with [her] long arms, grabbed this individual's hands, pulled them to his side, and then proceeded to walk up his chest and tap dance on his face with [her] heels until he passed out.

So even though I was somewhat of an embarrassment to the company, I was not nearly as embarrassed as the other individual, nor permanently scarred from the encounter with the orangutan.

DINKEL: Well, I have to admit, I shaded the truth prior to the listeners out there. I did know that story, but I just love hearing it.

After you left 312, you transferred next door, when 312 went north to Cherry Point to become an AV-8A squadron at that time. ...I remember you coming to the squadron I was in, VMFA-251. Tell us approximately what year that was. I also remember an arm-wrestling incident in that squadron also, regarding a Navy individual at the Naval Station at Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico.

BRINKLEY: Well, as I mentioned to you, that what goes around, comes around. I found myself reporting in to the Executive Officer...Major Wadsworth, after I had humiliated him when I was the champion of 312. So, Major Wadsworth, [was] trying to seize the opportunity to recoup some of his money, because he enjoyed wagering on such events. We deployed to Roosevelt Roads Naval...Station for a missile deployment. While there, Major Wadsworth encountered a Navy SEAL, who indicated to him that he had never been beaten in arm-wrestling. So Major Wadsworth capitalized on the situation and told me that this was my opportunity to redeem myself, and that he was going to wager all the money that he had lost on his previous arm-wrestling match on me, and if I lost this match, it would be the end of my career in Marine aviation. Fortunately for me, I was able to win the arm-wrestling match and, after that, finally got out of the doghouse with Major Wadsworth.

DINKEL: Yes, I remember that. I think the part that you left out was, [it] was this great big Navy SEAL...that you wound up arm-wrestling. If I remember correctly, this guy's arms were as big as my thighs...

I also remember [a] cross-country, out of 251, when you headed west out into Texas. I'm a little vague on the details of that. I just remember something significant happening.

BRINKLEY: This was after our deployment. I had redeemed myself and Major Wadsworth decided that in addition to winning arm-wrestling matches, that I might be entrusted to go cross-country without someone as a flight lead. So we launched out on a cross-country on our way to the West Coast. Overhead Texas, I experienced a utility hydraulic failure. I had a brand-new radar interceptor operator in my back seat, who knew very little about the airplane. The difference between my knowledge and his was probably [not much, and] together you could put [all of it] in a thimble.

But we experienced a hydraulic failure. I followed our procedures, hoping that I could have my back-seater review the procedures for me. I found out that he had left his pocket checklist back at Beaufort, South Carolina, so [he] was of no use to me at all.

But, at any rate, we set up for an approach and arrested landing to the north runway, and landed. For those of you who are not familiar with the F-4, with a utility failure you have no brakes, no nose wheel steering, or basically very little control on the ground. You have some pneumatic back-up air brakes. So you need to make [an] arrested landing and lower the arresting hook.

So we set up for a landing to the south with the arresting gear supposedly set up on the northern end of the runway, only to find out when we landed that they had set up the arrested landing on the south end of the runway. So we went flying down the runway with no brakes, no nose wheel steering, which then caused me to use the secondary emergency air brakes, which had no differential control. Being a young pilot, I promptly blew both tires, and found myself going sideways down this runway at 110 miles an hour.

Fortunately, with the luck and the grace of God, we somehow came to rest and didn't have to eject from the airplane. It was an experience that I later on was to repeat in my career in the F-4 again.

DINKEL: I find it ironic, as we reminisce about the old times, that we remember the spectacular things, but it's very difficult to remember those dull, boring training missions and the warning area at night doing radar intercepts to hone our proficiencies. But on that same line, I remember [that] VMFA-251 was back-to-back years Hanson Award winners, which is the finest fighter squadron in the Marine Corps. I remember General Leek coming down, who was the Commanding General of Fleet Marine Force Atlantic to give us an award at a mess night at Recruit Depot Parris Island. I remember that there were some events that I

must admit I was peripherally involved in that occurred that night...[at the mess night at] Parris Island. Do you recall that night?

BRINKLEY: Yes, I recall, and I'm going to try to be diplomatic and not to embarrass the interviewer. But, yes, actually, we had a very lively competition with our sister squadrons. The time of year, we were in the softball season, and during that period of time Captain Dinkel, I think it was, Captain Dinkel, and a First Lieutenant, Ivan Zimmer, who was a defensive end or defensive tackle at Nebraska, had had some words. Our squadron commander at that time was Major Mead, and as the [senior] Captain, he called me aside and...referred to me as the Bull Captain, the Senior Captain. It was my responsibility to make sure that all the Junior Captains and First Lieutenants in the squadron were kept in line. He was particularly concerned about this adversarial relationship between Rich and this Ivan Zimmer. I was directed that during this mess night, to make sure that we did not have any incidents that would embarrass the squadron, and that my job was to stay between these two individuals and provide the adult supervision, at which I was successful for at least some portion of the evening, until we had had the traditional speeches and toasts.

We had been asked by the group commander, who was present at the mess, to join him at the bar, and we did. I found myself a few feet apart between some verbal confrontation between Rich Dinkel and this Ivan Zimmer, trying to execute my responsibilities as given to me by the squadron commander, Major Mead. Oh, yes, and [I forgot to mention] the fifty-pound differential, but that seemed to have little of importance to Rich Dinkel at the time.

I stepped between them and faced Ivan Zimmer and told him that this was an inappropriate situation, and I asked him to cease and desist. He looked at me, took a sip from his rum and Coke, which I can recall very vividly, and then spit it in my face. My response

to that was to grab him by throat, slam him up against the wall and then to proceed to choke him, all in the guise of initially trying to preclude an embarrassing situation.

I remember someone trying to pull me off, to the point that my collar devices were penetrating my neck and blood was trickling down my neck, which at the time I was not interested in. There was only one thing I wanted to do, and that was to see that the purple color of Ivan Zimmer's face turned to stark white. But I finally was pulled off of First Lieutenant Zimmer and I found myself confronted by the group commander, who told me to leave his mess. So, obviously, my career was once again over. I'd embarrassed the squadron and the group in front of the three-star general. So my career in the Marine Corps was over, as far as I was concerned.

However, Major Mead immediately jumped to my support and said, "If Captain Brinkley leaves, my whole squadron leaves with him." So, now, not only is my career over, but so is my squadron commander's career and everybody in the squadron. So we all leave. I go home. Fortunately, for me, First Lieutenant Zimmer, who had a lot more to drink than anyone realized, for some strange reason went home, stripped down naked, and went running through the streets and was arrested by the military police. Then after it was said and done the next day— [Tape recorder turned off.]

DINKEL: This is Rich Dinkel back again. Side two of tape one for the Randy Brinkley interview. We had stopped abruptly on the last tape, because I was having too much fun listening to this story. But I think we left off where Ivan Zimmer was running naked through Laurel Bay housing.

BRINKLEY: Well, after being arrested, he was returned to his home and to his wife. Fortunately for me, after all the accounts of the evening were reviewed by the group commander, I was no longer in the doghouse with my squadron commander, and somehow I

survived the evening, despite his personal embarrassment. I will point out that the group commander was not promoted to brigadier general. [Now] this incident or this evening may or may not have played into that.

It's funny because Lieutenant Colonel Rockie Plant, who pulled me off of Ivan, was subsequently my squadron commander a couple weeks later. So once again, just by sheer luck or divine intervention, I was able to overcome a very awkward situation.

DINKEL: Yes, I distinctly remember the event, and I apologize vociferously for causing the altercation. I also remember that General Leek, when afforded apologies for the situation, said that it was the greatest display of camaraderie he had seen in recent years. But you brought up another point of...temporary temporary Major Rockie Plant, who later became our squadron CO. I remember Rockie Plant as being quite a colorful individual myself, both in the air and on the ground. Rather than speak of his exploits in the air, I remember an event where we went to Rosie Roads on a deployment and worked with the OV-10 squadron, who spotted our hits and guided us...there...[as] forward air controllers. I remember inviting them down to Beaufort and the entire VMO OV-10 squadron came down there. Events transpired at the Officers' Club that night that I think are worthy of mention. Do you remember the incidents of which I am speaking?

BRINKLEY: Yes, we had a very successful deployment and the OV-10s were doing the forward air control and tactical air control force, so as a result of that good relationship, we invited them down to Beaufort, South Carolina, the squadron, for a joint happy hour. Lieutenant Colonel Plant, whose nickname, call sign, was Rockie, because he was an All-Navy and All-Marine boxer, was there.

The commanding officer of the VMO squadron came down to this event. He had not been on the deployment with his detachment. In the ensuing activities there was a dice game

at the Officers' Club, and some disagreement about the dice, in which there was a question as to who had rolled what, that ended up in the somewhat inebriated CO of the OV-10 squadron hitting Lieutenant Colonel Plant, who sort of just looked at him and then hit him back and knocked him out cold. Unfortunately for Lieutenant Colonel Plant, in doing so he broke his wrist, or his little finger on his right hand. Normally this would not be a problem, but after we had returned, Lieutenant Colonel Plant had been selected to go to [be] the CO of another squadron that was getting ready to carrier-qual for a Navy deployment. Now, the squadron commander could not carrier-qual because his right hand was in a cast from his elbow to the end of his little finger. Again, somewhat of an embarrassment with the General officers in our chain of command.

DINKEL: To the uninitiated, this might sound like we were a disciplineless rabble at the time, but of course, that was not the case. There just happened to be a war going on that we were training for.

After 251, Randy, I remember AWS, Amphibious Warfare School, and the training command, but I don't remember which order. Would you care to expand on that?

BRINKLEY: Well, after that, shortly thereafter, I received orders, along with a number of us, to go to the [Naval Air] Training Command as a flight instructor. For me, that was a very good thing, because most of the effort was in Vietnam, and we had poor maintenance and poor parts. So there was not a lot of flight time and experience to be derived in the squadrons in the States. So this was an opportunity for me, who had started, I had a late start in aviation, to build up some flight time.

So I went to the Navy Training Command as an instructor and went through instructor training in Pensacola and was assigned to Meridian, Mississippi, to VT-19. Again, because of my seniority, I ended up as the Assistant Director of Training for the squadron.

While I was there, after being checked out, and I was able to go on a cross-country and return to Key West, where one of the squadrons, VMFA-251, was on deployment, I offered to use our T-2 as a bogey for some of their intercepts. Rich Dinkel, once again, was still in the squadron, and so we had an interesting interface with my little T-2 acting as sort of the drone for the F-4 squadrons.

It was interesting. I had a young student with me and we would watch the F-4 come screaming by. At that time we had no forward [quarter] infrared capability on the Sidewinders in the F-4. With their turn radius, my young student in the back seat says, "Where did they go?"

I said, "They'll be back in about five minutes after they get turned around."

We did that until the F-4s ran out of gas, for a couple [of] flights, and then we returned.

After eighteen months in the Training Command, I had felt like I'd learned everything I needed to learn and it was time for me to get back into real airplanes, but the only way I could leave the Training Command early was to go to school in the Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico, Virginia. So I was selected for the last six-month course, before the Marine Corps found out how to take a three-month curriculum and spread into nine months.

So I went to Quantico and spent six months, and then, following that, was reassigned overseas, reassigned for F-4 training in Cherry Point. Then after completing two months of training, I was reassigned to VMFA-232, which at that time was in Nam Phong, Thailand, to join at this point in time, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Mead, my former squadron commander at [312], and Jack Hammond, the maintenance officer of 201, who was now the maintenance officer. That was my next iteration, having completed my academic studies, to return to flying Marine fighters.

DINKEL: [The] Rose Garden. I remember [the] Rose Garden well. ...The CG of Task Force Delta at that time was Andy O'Donnell. If I remember correctly, Swede Bjorklin, later a Brigadier, was the group commander as a Colonel, isn't that right? If I remember also, you got there just after I had left. I was the unlucky guy that opened that place, and I think you were the lucky guy that closed that place. Isn't that correct?

BRINKLEY: Yes, it was an interesting iteration for me, arriving at the end of the war and having to retrograde or close the place. In typical fashion, when they deployed the other Marines didn't have very good records of who did what to whom. As we left there, Colonel Bjorklin was somewhat concerned, because they had a number of somewhat large numbers of items of major equipment that were unaccounted for, things like bulldozers and road scrapers and other things that somehow had disappeared.

[For] my first job in the squadron, Lieutenant Colonel Mead [had] told me that I was to do an investigation and find out, account for these items that had been missing, these large pieces of equipment that had been missing for a couple of years. I approached another friend, "Zippo," Carl Smith who had a law degree, sought his advice on how to deal with this investigation. After interviewing everyone that I could, and no one knew nothing, and recognizing that the squadron commander was not going to let me fly a combat mission until I had resolved this investigation, I concluded that it was somewhere between an act of God or an act of war.

My good friend Hugh Ronalds, who was very articulate with pen, was able to craft this investigation in such a way that somewhere in Southeast Asia today I'm sure there are road scrapers and bulldozers that are being productively employed, with the United States Marine Corps markings on them. But they have been accounted for in this investigation that I was able to complete.

After that, I was able to fly a few combat sorties in which we flew over to Laos and dropped bombs into the trees. Then we were able to, as the last Marine squadron in Southeast Asia, we left the war and returned to the Philippines, which is another saga that I won't go into here.

DINKEL: That's good, we didn't really want to hear that part. I just want you to know that those road graders and bulldozers were very great bargaining commodities when we first got there to Nam Phong at the Rose Garden. They weren't really Marine Corps after all. They really started off as Air Force, but they wound up with Marine Corps paint jobs and wound up on Marine Corps rolls.

Okay. Let's see, we're talking '73, '74 here. Then you rotated out of country. Where did you go? Refresh us on the year.

BRINKLEY: Well, 232 was a fine squadron and we were selected as Fighter Squadron of the Year. From there I was reassigned to the West Coast to the Third Marine Aircraft Wing and to VMFA-531. That was in 1973. I joined the squadron. Lieutenant Colonel Jack Gagan was the squadron commander. I was assigned as the Operations Officer of that squadron.

That was a very good squadron and a very good year. We subsequently won the Fighter Squadron of the Year, the Hanson Award. During that period of time, I came to know a young Navy Lieutenant flight surgeon by the name of Manley Lanier, Sonny Carter, who flew in my back seat on occasion. I can remember Sonny because every time he flew in my back seat he always got sick and threw up. I'm not sure it was because of my flying or his queasiness, but we became good friends.

After a year, that squadron was selected to transition the F-14s, and then I moved to a sister squadron, VMFA-323, as the Ops Officer, and as did Sonny Carter, and we subsequently won the Fighter Squadron of the Year again. We had a very good squadron.

We had a great squadron commander, Mike Sullivan, the infamous Mike Sullivan, a wonderful squadron commander.

After a year in that squadron, I was selected to go to Marine Aviation Weapons and Training Unit, Pacific to head up the F-4 fighter training section there at El Toro.

DINKEL: Yes, that was when MAWTU Pac was at El Toro before the squadron...moved to Yuma, which we'll talk about later in your career.

The captain's making an announcement now. We're just going to speak over it.

If I remember correctly, also, that's when the MAWTU Pac conducted the first two Weapons Tactics Instructor courses. I remember an award during that same time. I'd like for you to talk about the WTI courses, the award, and your brother's award at the same time.

BRINKLEY: Well, because I had been fortunate enough to have been the Operations Officer of three Fighter Squadrons of the Year, 232 in the Pacific with Lieutenant Colonel Mead, and then, following that, with 531 and [Lieutenant Colonel] Jack Gagan at El Toro, then subsequently, 323 with Lieutenant Colonel Mike Sullivan, I had achieved a degree of notoriety, certainly not deserved, which resulted in me being selected to head up the very prestigious, at least in terms of the Marine fighter community, F-4 section of MAWTU Pac, and we proceeded to implement a combined and integrated training program, Weapons and Tactics Instructors' program, to train tactics instructions for all squadrons.

DINKEL: Why don't you say what...MAWTU Pac is.

BRINKLEY: MAWTU Pac is Marine Aviation Weapons and Training Unit. We had one on the East Coast and one on the West Coast.

We were able to put together an integrated training Weapons and Tactics Instructor program for graduate-level training of our instructors, each of which would go back to their squadrons and be responsible for training within that squadron. My job was basically to put together the curriculum for MAWTU Pac, which was subsequently adopted and led to the formation of a MAWTS-1, Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One.

Because of the previous success of the squadrons I had been [in], and the efforts in MAWTU Pac, I was selected for...the very prestigious Cunningham Award, which is the Marine Aviator of the Year, in honor of Alfred A. Cunningham, who was the first Marine aviator. That was a great honor for me, following such greats in Marine aviation as John Glenn. But like everything, there's good news and bad news, and as soon as I received this award, I was immediately reassigned to school and a non-flying follow-on staff billet.

At the time, or slightly thereafter, a few months later, my brother, Sam Brinkley, received the Leftwich Award, which was the award for outstanding leadership for the Marine ground officer, or infantry officer of the year, named after Colonel Leftwich.

I left El Toro and spent six months in Rome, Italy. It was interesting. I received orders to the NATO Defense College in Rome. My monitor called me and said, "You're going to Rome." I thought he meant Rome, Georgia, or Rome, New York. I had no idea he meant Rome, Italy, and I couldn't figure out what in the world the Marines were doing in either place.

But, at any rate, I left the West Coast and proceeded to Rome, Italy, for six months of school, subsequently spent a year and a half in Naples, Italy, on the NATO staff. I certainly, once I arrived in Naples, found myself in the company of friends that I had known in the past. Lieutenant Colonel Jack Hammond was there on the staff.

After a few months there, Sonny Carter arrived. Sonny had, after being sick in my back seat and others, had decided to go to flight school. But on his way to completing flight school, but before he was assigned to his first squadron, he was reassigned to the USS

Forrestal as senior medical officer, and arrived at my doorstep one day in Naples, Italy. As a result of that, he became good friends with Jack Hammond and spent all his time in port when he was in Naples with me. As a result of that, when Lieutenant Colonel Hammond returned to Beaufort, South Carolina, as luck would have it, now Colonel Mead was the Air Group Commander. Lieutenant Colonel Hammond convinced him that we needed to have this young Navy Lieutenant Commander, Sonny Carter, join the air group as a young pilot.

Upon my completion of my staff tour in Naples, Italy, I, too, was reassigned to Beaufort, South Carolina, to join MAG-31, under the command of Jim Mead.

DINKEL: Yes, I remember all that. I have to correct Mr. Brinkley here, and I want to refer back to the Cunningham Award and the Leftwich Award, where Mr. Brinkley and his brother, Sam, receiving the fighter pilot and the finest ground officer award in the Marine Corps was an unequivocally one of a kind [event], only done once in...Marine Corps [history]. Never done before.

Sonny Carter's association with us from that time hence, would go down in our memory for a long time after he was subsequently selected for test pilot school and then to be an astronaut. That's another story on another tape. We'll come back to that.

Now, we want to talk about [you] as you came back to MAG-31 in Beaufort, South Carolina, again, you came back as the Commanding Officer of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312.

BRINKLEY: Well, it was kind of interesting. Not initially. I spent my year in purgatory as the Group Operations Officer for Colonel Mead. After he got his pound of blood out of me in a year, he allowed me to take over command of VMFA-312.

Now, in retrospect and during my days in Naples, Italy, with Lieutenant Colonel Jack Hammond and myself, we discussed which squadron we would like to have when we

returned to flying and which squadron that we wouldn't like to have, because when we were in 232 in Southeast Asia, we competed with VMFA-115 for the Hanson Award, and we both very much disliked 115. Jack Hammond always said, "I would never want to be the CO of 115." As it turned out, after the war was over, 115 returned to MAG-31, was one of the squadrons that was in the air group.

In my case, my days in VMFA-312, I didn't particularly enjoy very much, because we didn't get to fly a great deal. So my response to that, "Well, I would never want to be the CO of VMFA-312," because it was such a poor squadron.

Everything that goes around, comes around. Lieutenant Colonel Hammond assumed command of the VMFA-115, and I assumed command of the VMFA-312, and Colonel Mead told us both it was time, [and] that we were responsible, for turning both of the squadrons around.

DINKEL: Okay. I think we'll stop here and take a break and change the tape, because I'm out of tape. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Okay. Now, this is a continuation of the interview with Randy Brinkley. The date is the same as it was before on the first tape and we're now about halfway between Goose Bay and Keflavik, Iceland.

We're going to continue...and pick up from the spot where we were talking about VMFA-312, where Randy was the Commanding Officer. Randy, who were some of the guys who were in the squadron at 312 at that time?

BRINKLEY: Well, one person in particular was, at that time First Lieutenant Andy Allen, who was a first-year aviator, and, as you know, subsequently went on to have a very prestigious career in the United States Marine Corps and has recently retired as an astronaut with NASA and Shuttle commander. But Andy was in the squadron as a first lieutenant, and during my

tenure as commander, I made Andy the [squadron] maintenance officer...as a very young Captain.

We also had a very great group of young officers, highly talented aviators. Gil Butler, another very talented aviator. Jim Smee, who was later to serve with us in MAWTS-1, was also in the squadron. I had the squadron for about two years. We were on the unit deployment program from Beaufort, South Carolina, MAG-31. We trained. We were the first squadron to receive the F-4S, slated Ss, in the Marine Corps. We trained and took the squadron to the Pacific for six months.

During that deployment to the Pacific, I had a very lucky and unfortunate situation, a mid-air collision with an F-16, in which I lost half of my right wing. I was somehow able to continue to fly the F-4, and subsequently landed it, and it saved the airplane. The F-16 was cut basically in half, but the pilot was fortunate and ejected and landed in the only island in the North China Sea within 100 miles, in the middle of January. Otherwise, he would have not survived more than a couple of minutes.

But after finishing that tour with 312 and MAG-31, I was selected to go MAWTS-1, Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1, in Yuma, Arizona, as the Executive Officer and selected for the follow-on command for MAWTS-1. MAWTS-1, as you may recall, was the follow-on to the MAWTU-2 Lant and Pac efforts that I had been involved in before I went on my staff tour and school in Europe.

I spent a year as the Executive Officer for that squadron for Major General Jake Vermilyea, at that time Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel Jake Vermilyea. Then I assumed command of the squadron in a very challenging time. The squadron had undergone a series of unfortunate [ground] accidents and air crashes. Certainly, the task of the whole squadron, and particularly our Safety Officer, Rich Dinkel, was to eliminate the rash of accidents that we had experienced, and to further enhance the Weapons and Tactics...Instructor curriculum for the Marine Corps to incorporate night-vision goggles and the training for night vision and

nap of the Earth, for the helicopter community, as well as low-altitude tactics training for the fixed-wing.

We also were able to incorporate a Senior Officers' Weapons and Tactics Instructors' Course during that time frame. The scope of activities—and this took place between 19[9]3 and '9]6—also included aviation development and tactics evaluation, the development of Marine aviation requirements plan for all the Marine Corps. We had a very close relationship with the Department of Navy, and specifically John Lehman, the Secretary of the Navy. I'm proud to say that MAWTS-1 provided the prototype for the Navy Strike Warfare Center and integrated training that exists today in the Navy at Naval Air Station Fallon.

We also had a leadership role in the lessons learned in tactical exchange with the Israeli Air Force, as well as training with other foreign nationals, which included participation by those foreign nationals in the Weapons and Tactics Instructors' course that we conducted at Yuma, Arizona.

I spent a year and a half as Commanding Officer, following my tenure as the Executive Officer of MAWTS-1. Subsequently, I was selected by the Secretary of the Navy, or the [Commandant] of the Marine Corps, to participate on the Navy's Strategic Studies Group, a year-long fellowship in Newport, Rhode Island.

DINKEL: Let me interrupt just a second. I think you're being a little bashful [about] MAWTS-1. ...MAWTS-1 was quite an organization. There's a couple of things I want to cover about MAWTS-1. ...This is a very highly decorated organization. It's significant in that there was a lot of team-building going on down at MAWTS-1 at that time. There's a lot of names that [are] familiar with[in] NASA involved with the unit at that time. In addition to that, I'd like to talk about the scope of the tasking of the organization, and just how wide this scope was, and some of the things that came out of there. So let's talk about the awards and then we'll go the team-building portion of it.

BRINKLEY: Well, we were very, very fortunate. I think that the recognition that we received as a team was well deserved. We received the Navy Unit Commendation from the Secretary of the Navy for our achievements and integrated weapons and tactics training. We also received from the Marine Corps the Aviation and Efficiency Award as the most efficient organization in all of Marine aviation. We also received, for the first time in the history of MAWTS-1, an Aviation Safety Award for accident-free flying.

When you look at the type of flying that we did in that particular squadron, it's particularly impressive, because everything that we did was on the ragged edge in terms of the demands on the aircraft and the air crew, nap of the Earth, night-vision goggles, low-altitude tactics and training, large-scale strikes, coordinated efforts, day and night. The level of activities would include upwards of 100 flights a day.

If you look at the tempo of operations, it's particularly noteworthy, because the maintenance organization that supported this was a composite organization that came together in a matter of days for aircraft and personnel from all over the Navy, the Marine Corps, other services that were put together in a rapid integrated fashion that supported such a high tempo of operations.

So the fact that we were able to task-organize in such a rapid period of time, and be able to do so without any major aircraft accidents is certainly a noteworthy achievement. The lessons learned there ha[ve] been able to be incorporated into the Marine Corps' concept of rapid deployment and composite operations that exist today.

DINKEL: Let's talk about the familiar names to the NASA people that might have been involved down there. Why don't you just talk about that for just a quick second, and then talk about the association with Strike University.

BRINKLEY: I think the application of lessons learned from that particular effort was relevant, not only to the other services, particularly the United States Navy, with the development of Navy Strike Warfare Center and the incorporation of integrated training between Navy Fighter Weapons School and the Navy Strike Warfare Center, all consolidated at Fallon, but it's also had applicability in terms of integrated training in the space activities. I think it's particularly noteworthy today when we look at NASA and human space flight, operations and integrated training, that the pioneers of this effort have also been able to apply their skills and experience significantly and to the efforts of NASA and human space flight.

As an example, we look back at the Deputy Chief of Staff of Marine Aviation was Brigadier General Jack Dailey, now the Deputy Administrator of NASA. The head of the Aviation Development Tactics Evaluation [Department] of MAWTS-1 at that time was Major Mike Mott, who also is...[the] Associate [Deputy] Administrator for NASA. [If] we look more closely in terms of the Office of Space Flight and Human Space Flight Activities on the NASA side, Rich Dinkel, who led the efforts, provided the leadership, and [was] the catalyst for our safety efforts, and the recognition that we received, is now the Deputy for Safety, Reliability, and Quality Assurance for Johnson Space Center, the lead Center for all human space flight operations for NASA.

We also have the expertise of Major General Jake Vermilyea, who I had the opportunity to work for as his Executive Officer, who is the Vice President for Operations for United Space Alliance, [who are] responsible for [the] safe employment of the space shuttle. We also have Howard DeCastro, who is [the] Program Manager, and the first for the United Space Alliance [USA], for the Shuttle Program. Howard was the first Commanding Officer of MAWTS-1.

So we clearly have a strong relationship between the experience and lessons learned in MAWTS-1 that has been able to have been applied to safe and efficient and integrated operations for Space Shuttle and Station operations.

DINKEL: Well, that's good. I just wanted to cover some of that. Let's go back to this Strategic Studies Group. For the people out there listening, how about telling us where that is and what that Strategic Studies Group really does.

BRINKLEY: It is located at the Naval Warfare Center in Newport, Rhode Island. Each year a very fortunate selected group of individuals are brought together to work on specific projects as directed by the Chief of Naval Operations, and to make recommendations for the Department of the Navy and the Navy and the Marine Corps.

For me, I was very fortunate to participate in a very prestigious group of individuals, which included General Tony Zinni, who is now the Commander-in-Chief of CentCom, who [was] one of the three Marines on our group.

We also had Mike O'Brien, who is the Deputy Associate Administrator for International Affairs for NASA. We've been able to bring Mike's expertise from the Navy and the Strategic Studies Group to bear for NASA, and apply it particularly for the International Space Station, and our working in an international partnership in a cooperative effort for the Space Station. Skip Omen [phonetic], who's our nuclear submariner is now a four-star Admiral, as well as the other naval officers that are all two and three and four-star Admirals.

So it was a very great opportunity for us to interface with high-level flag officers and the highest levels within the State Department, and to learn from that, certainly something that has benefited me in my current position as a Program Manager of [the] International Space Station, understanding how to work in an international environment and understanding the intricacies of various partners.

Of particular note is our focus was studying the Russians, and I find myself spending a great deal of my time trying to incorporate the Russians into the International Space

Station. I suppose you certainly learn a great deal in studying your enemies, because we have gone from enemies into partners. The time and effort that was spent studying the Russians has been well worthwhile in terms of learning how to bridge the gaps between the Russians and the Americans and define common ground and work together as a team.

DINKEL: That's good. That's really relevant to what we're doing right here, now, today, heading toward Moscow. It's also interesting to me, [in that] I never realized that all those important people were in the Strategic Studies Group at the same time.

Where did you go from there? If I remember correctly, you went back towards 2nd MAW.

BRINKLEY: From the Strategic Studies Group, I was selected to return to the Second Marine Aircraft Wing, assigned for a year as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations of the Second Marine Aircraft Wing, responsible for the operations of some 800 aircraft, [2nd MAW is] the largest organization within the Marine Corps.

I arrived at 2nd MAW as the Operations Officer, to find myself involved in the planning of operations in the Middle East, in the Persian Gulf. I spent a very busy year there trying to apply the lessons learned from MAWTS-1, in terms of integrated training not only within the Second Marine Aircraft Wing, but composite kind[s] of training and joint force training with the Navy and the Air Force units on the East Coast. That was a very beneficial experience for me.

But after a year there in that position, I was selected, or afforded the opportunity, to move back to Beaufort, South Carolina, for my third tour of duty, as the Commanding Officer of Marine Aircraft Group 31, the largest Marine Fighter...Group in the Marine Corps, commanding six F-18 squadrons.

I arrived there with a lot of the same faces, faces that even today that I still see. As an example, Major C. J. Sturckow, who we will join tomorrow [in Moscow], is the pilot on the first Space Station flight to assemble the International Space Station, was a young Captain in the Group. He and I went through aircraft tactics instructor refresher training together, or at least for me. C. J. was my instructor. I've been able to watch him grow and mature. Now he's certainly established himself as one of our finest pilots and potential commanders at NASA for the Shuttle. [Tape recorder turned off.]

I was disappointed not to be able to participate in the combat activities of the MAG-31 squadrons that were deployed to [Operation] Desert Storm, but I do take great pride and personal satisfaction that [because] of the training that we established for those squadrons and the fact that all the squadrons, all the F-18 squadrons in the Marine Corps, both deployed and returned safely back to the United States without loss of any of our aircraft, and, most importantly, any of our air crew. I attribute that to the applications of the lessons that we learned at MAWTS-1 and integrated training and composite and joint operations.

It's reassuring to hear from C. J. Sturckow that the things that I insisted on as a Group Commander, that the young officers didn't understand and thought were crazy, were exactly the things they had to do in Desert Storm, at least in C. J.'s view. [They] were the things that made them so successful. So, although personally I didn't get to participate, the fact that we did not lose any of our fine young Marines in that activity, and everyone came home safely, is probably the highlight of my Marine Corps career.

[End of Interview]