

## Interview with Robert Tyler

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Interview #1: December 9, 2013

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, December 9, 2013, and this is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I am in Decatur, Illinois with Colonel Retired Robert Tyler. You don't like to go by Robert as much as Bob, do you?

Tyler: Bob. The only people that call me Robert are my mother when she's mad at me. (both laugh)

DePue: Hopefully that's not much anymore. I'm sure she's proud of you. We are here because we want to talk to you about your long experience in the military. We're certainly going to focus quite a bit on the Vietnam War, but you also were involved with Desert Storm. All of this experience was in the United States Marine Corps as an aviator for pretty much your entire career, wasn't it?

Tyler: Yes. From 1969 on I was an aviator. I enlisted, so I got a couple years enlisted time before I went to OCS [Officer's Candidate's School] and then flight school.

DePue: It's going to be a while before we get to that part of the story because I wanted to start where we always start, and that's learning where you were born and when you were born.

Tyler: Born Fort Sheridan, Illinois, in December of 1947.

DePue: Fort Sheridan, 1947.

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: What caused you to be born there?

Tyler: My mother was married to a... It was probably Army Air Corps by that point in time—I don't remember when the Army Air Corps became the Air Force—but he was a tail gunner on I think B-17's, if that's right, over in the European Theatre during World War II. They got married. She had family up there, and he was stationed in Arizona, so she went up to Waukegan to have me. Once there, the nearest military hospital, of course, was Fort Sheridan. So that's where I was born.



*Robert at approximately six months with his mother, Betty McClaghry, taken while they were living in Waukegan, Illinois in 1948*

DePue: He was still in the military at the time.

Tyler: He was still in the military.

DePue: And where was he again?

Tyler: He was in, I think, Tucson, Arizona, but he was stationed in Arizona at the time.

DePue: What was your father's name?

Tyler: Gale Robert McClaghry.

DePue: That begs some questions, and I know we're going to get there in fairly quick order. How about your mother's name?

Tyler: Betty Jane, maiden name Keller.

DePue: Betty Jane Keller?

Tyler: Um-hmm.

DePue: That's a nice all-American name there.

Tyler: All-American name. No German roots at all.

DePue: You were born at Fort Sheridan. Your father was down, stationed in Tucson?

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: Why wasn't the family down in Tucson?

Tyler: Well, they had been in Tucson, and Mom told Dad that. "I'm going back to my aunt and uncles to have the baby," because she wanted to be around family. So, she went back. And as many years later, when I met Dad, he indicated, "I thought she was just going back to have the baby, and she was coming back, but she never came back."

DePue: So, she came back, and somewhere along the line got divorced?

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: When did they initially get married?

Tyler: They got married... Can you pause that?

(pause in recording)

DePue: We're back on again.

Tyler: She got divorced in April...looks like 25, 1950, okay. And they got married... I do not have her marriage to my dad.

DePue: Were they married during the Second World War?

Tyler: No. She was a war bride, if you will. They weren't married that long.

DePue: But if you were born in forty-seven, and she never went back down to Tucson., or maybe she did. But it sound like she never got back together with your biological father.

Tyler: That's right; that's correct.

DePue: And that divorce was in 1950.

Tyler: That divorce was in 1950.

DePue: Do you know what your biological father did for a living after the war?

Tyler: Because we met him when I was stationed at El Toro, he was an election official with the San Bernardino County Election Committee or whatever. So, he set up all of the election sites, the voting booths, took care of all that sort of stuff. So, out of the County Clerk's Office I guess, and he did all that stuff. Was active in Little League, sports and other stuff out there but had a very middleclass, successful life in a large county in California.

I had no contact with him after they were divorced, and then Mom and my stepdad adopted me in... Oh, I'm trying to remember when that was. It was certainly in... I had the paperwork somewhere, but I don't have it.

DePue: It's not all that important.

Tyler: Yeah, it was somewhere around, you know, after fifty-three, when they got married. So, it would have been in fifty-four, fifty-five timeframe.

DePue: Did your mother stay up at Fort Sheridan for the next few years after you were born?

Tyler: Well, she went [talking to himself about address list, divorce papers]... We went from being born and Fort Sheridan, Great Lakes, then in April forty-eight to June 1950, she was back in Tucson, Arizona. And then we moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for a little over a year, June fifty to August of fifty-one. Then she went up to Canton, Ohio—Mom was originally from Ohio—and we were up there for a few months, August to November. And then she went back down in November of fifty-one through December of fifty-three to Tucson, Arizona, where she met my stepdad, and they got married in December of fifty-three.

DePue: And what's your stepdad's name?

Tyler: Roy E. Tyler.

DePue: And what did he do?

Tyler: He was in the Air Force—I believe he was the Air Force by that time—and he was in for long enough to get his VA benefits. It was after the war, got his training as a truck mechanic, and was discharged in fifty-three or so, at the end of fifty-three.

DePue: Do you remember them getting married? You would have been six.

Tyler: Yes, I was in the wedding. I remember it; it was a wedding. Friends of theirs owned a motel there in Tucson, and we lived in that motel. They got married in the owners' suite, if you will, or that area or the lobby of the hotel or whatever. So yeah, I remember the little wedding, and it was very low key and whatever else.

DePue: Did you have any siblings at that time?

Tyler: No, no, just me.

DePue: What did you think about Mom getting remarried?

Tyler: I thought it was kind of cool—I had a dad—because I never had a dad at that point in time because they had split up. And like I said, they did their thing.

DePue: And they adopted you right after they got married, he did?

Tyler: Within a couple of years and certainly by the time I was in... Sometime in fifty-four, before June of fifty-five, I was adopted when we were living in Franklin, Indiana.

DePue: What took the family to Franklin?

Tyler: Dad followed an Army buddy or Air Force buddy who owned a saw mill in a little town called Bargersville, just south of Indianapolis. And George said, "Roy, I got a job for you if you want to come along." So, we went with George up to Bargersville, and we spent... Well, from December of fifty-three until August of fifty-eight, and Dad worked for George for all those five years.

DePue: Had your dad been in the military during World War II?

Tyler: No, not during World War II. I think it was all over. He was kind of... He came in at the very end of it. We're talking about... When I look at his paperwork, it's less than two years.

DePue: Less than two years during the World War II era?

Tyler: Well, fifty-one to fifty-three timeframe, so it's actually Korea War.

DePue: Oh, so he just had your standard enlistment or even as a draftee would have had two years.

Tyler: Yeah, and he even got out early on that.

DePue: So it sounds like he had no intention of making the military a career.

Tyler: Nope, don't think so.

DePue: Was Bargersville his side of the family or your mom's side of the family?

Tyler: Neither side. He went back to go with George. He grew up in Borton, Illinois.

DePue: Morton?

Tyler: Borton. B-o-r-t-o-n, a little itty-bitty burg in Edgar County.

DePue: How long did the family live in Bargersville?

Tyler: Bargersville, we lived there a year, and then we lived in Franklin for a year, and then back to Bargersville for the next three years. So that constituted the five years that we were living and working with George. Franklins just like ten miles down the road.

DePue: Was your mom working during that time?

Tyler: She worked part of that time, various jobs. She was a telephone operator. She did some other stuff. That's when my brother was born in that timeframe. My brother Frank was born then. He was born in fifty-five, October of fifty-five.

DePue: So there's eight years difference between the two of you.

Tyler: Yes, um-hmm.

DePue: You mentioned that they were there for a few years, and then they moved to Illinois after that?

Tyler: We moved to Watseka where Dad sold John Deere for a year up there, and then we moved back down in the countryside and then into the village of Redmon where we stayed. It was interesting. My folks voted on our side of the street in Redmon, but the voting precinct was Borton, five miles away, where Dad had originally grew up. So, we were back in Dad's hometown at that point in time.

DePue: And you got to Redmon what year?

Tyler: Got to Redmon in... It would have been July of 1959.

DePue: Which would put you right at about twelve years old at that time.

Tyler: Um-hmm.

DePue: So up through those first twelve years, you've moved around a lot. The family's moved a lot.

Tyler: Yeah, we actually moved around... When my kids complain about moving around in a military family, all I have to do is break out this little black book and say, "Un-huh, got nothing over these civilians. They move around as much too."

DePue: I wanted to ask you a few questions about... A lot of people look back in the late fifties, early sixties, as this idyllic time to be growing up as a young kid in America, that the middle class was doing pretty well; the kids had a lot of freedom. I wanted to see what your thoughts were in having moved around as much as you did.

Tyler: The time in Bargarville was kind of fun. We lived on a farm, a small farm. George had a few head of cattle, some hogs. He dabbled in a lot of things. We ended up raising chickens on a large scale, and that was fun. I got to do things like drive tractors and drive full trucks and play in hay lofts and do all that sort of stuff. I had a paper route and everything else, and life was pretty grand.

Moved as a middle-schooler. Seventh grade I spent in Watseka, and that was probably the worst year. You know, you move just before the school

year started and then ended up spending a year there. And it never really... because you didn't have friends yet, you're in that process of making friends and doing all that sort of stuff. I didn't think it was that great.

Then we moved back down to Redmon; it was eighth grade, and things kind of settled in to eighth grade. And then high school at Brocton, in a small town where everybody knew you. I managed to get into a decent peer group, I think, that was kind of the basketball stars. I wasn't a basketball star, but I played on the team a little bit and did that sort of stuff, got into the play practices. It was fun. Of course, you didn't know—

As I've come back later and taken care of Mom's finances now and other stuff, they were definitely lower, middle class, if even that. They didn't have a lot of money, but life seemed good. I didn't have any real angst. Mom worked at Zenith, there in Paris, for the whole time I was in high school. She was one of the early ones that got hired on when the plant was built there in Paris. Dad worked the whole time for Robinson John Deere out of Chrisman that had a shop there in Redmon. When that closed, he commuted up to Chrisman and took care of the farmers in the area, going back and forth.

Life seemed pretty good. I wouldn't say it was idyllic or however we want to say that, but it was good. I had good friends. We were involved in the church, over in Paris. My best friend was the P.K. [Pastor's Kid], and that's a good way to get in a lot of trouble, when you're friends with the P.K.

DePue: P.K being pastor's kid.

Tyler: Pastor's kid. Butch and I ran around a lot together all the way through high school. He dated a girl from my high school. In fact, he introduced me to my wife when we were in high school. We didn't get married in high school of course, but he was the instigator in making the connection with the two of us. But life was good. I wouldn't want to go back and relive it necessarily, but it was okay.

DePue: What denomination?

Tyler: Lutheran.

DePue: Was the family strongly religious?

Tyler: Mom liked to have the roots. Dad would go to church and sit in the pews. He never joined the church the whole time we were there. Don't know why, but he just didn't. I did, in Boy Scouts, the Boy Scout merit badge for being involved in religious activities and all that sort of stuff. Wouldn't say we were highly religious, but she would follow the snow plow to church on Sunday morning and made sure I went to confirmation every Saturday morning until I was confirmed.

It was an integral part of what we were doing and, of course, even then the church was still part of your social life. As a teenager there was the church youth group, and I belonged to that. Certainly, since Butch was the P.K., we were going to go. We ushered when we were in high school at church. There was that involvement and duty that was required.

DePue: During those years of your growing up did you have any contact at all with your biological dad?

Tyler: None, none.

DePue: Did you ever worry about that at all?

Tyler: I didn't worry about that. It wasn't a big deal. I got to "select" my new name when I was adopted, and my middle name was chosen to be after my mother's youngest brother who was killed in Korea actually, after the armistice and from doing a—can I say it? A dumb shit—smoking a cigarette above his fox hole at night. Of course, you could see the bright cigarette butt, and a sniper shot him.

DePue: But after the armistice?

Tyler: Yep.

DePue: When the fighting was theoretically over.

Tyler: That's the story I got from my uncle, Mom's brother, older brother, because Russell had been in and out of trouble, and the judge gave him an option to join the Army or go to jail. That's the story I get from the two uncles, which is a different story than Mom likes to tell for her baby brother. Her baby brother was just this lovely little guy, and that's why I'm named after him. I got to choose that, right? (laughs)

DePue: You were probably encouraged a little bit to choose that, were you?

Tyler: I think encouraged is a nice way of putting it; yes, sir.

DePue: How about your relationship with your father?

Tyler: With my stepfather was fine. He was older than my mother by several years and had never had kids before. Theirs was a rocky marriage all along. I think it's because he never figured out how to read Mom's mind. So there was always a little bit of level of tension in the house, certainly in the high school days and everything.

But Dad and I kind of got along fine. He expected things to be done, and I had chores and responsibilities and whatever else. But no, I have good respect for him. He was a man of integrity, and that was important to him.



Chasing money and big toys and all that sort of stuff wasn't important. But what was important was his handshake. When he said, "That's a deal." That was a deal. He was good.

He did small engine maintenance or whatever in the tool shed, was good with tools. I learned a lot of things from him, as far as being a handyman around the house, tinkering on cars. Certainly, I wouldn't tinker on my current little toy out there, but in the early days, in high school, I played with working on my car and doing that sort of stuff. He was good for that sort of stuff.

DePue: Who would you say had the strongest influence on you growing up?

Tyler: Well, as the first born, you're an experiment. (laughs) As far as influence growing up, I don't know who had the most influence because the parents are kind of trying to figure out how to do it, and you're trying to figure out how to work in. I certainly had a lot of influence from Dad.

[I] got an awful lot of influence in those early years from George and his son Ronnie, who was a former Marine, by the way, a sergeant, who was the Boy Scout troop leader in Bargarville. I always thought highly of him, and I told him at... No, Carol told him, at his mother's funeral, that he was probably responsible for me actually joining the Marine Corps many years later because I thought so highly of him.

But if I look at who had the most influence, I can pick, out of that timeframe, several folks. George because I spent some time on George's farm even in high school. I'd go back for the summer and spend a couple of weeks with him. Dad certainly because of the daily contact with him. Mom to some extent, as well. You look at the other guys, the other farmers that I worked for in the summertime, in high school...

Back in those days you could work on a farm, cutting corn out of beans and baling hay and doing all that sort of stuff, a dollar an hour, a minimum wage, right? But a dollar an hour, a penny a bale, or whatever it was. You spent a lot of time with lots of men, and you started... You kind of got, "This is what it means to be a guy in this part of Illinois." So, I didn't give you a good answer, did I? Just kind of all over the place.

DePue: No, that's a very good answer. You're close to Paris. How big a town was Richmond?

Tyler: Redmon. Redmon was 250 people. When I was growing up, I used to say it had eighty-six and a half houses; the half was falling down. (laughs) I don't know whether that's an accurate count or not, but that's always been a good story when I try and tell people... Dad was the Village Clerk, worked with the—

DePue: Was that an elected position?

- Tyler: (sighs) Must have been. It was small town. I guess he ran for it. I don't remember him politicking for it. It was probably one of those things, "Hey, Roy, would you be our village clerk?" "Okay, yeah, I'll stand for election." "Okay, you're it." He was on the volunteer fire department and all that stuff. But he was the village clerk for several years while I was in high school and afterwards.
- DePue: What was the high school you attended?
- Tyler: Brocton.
- DePue: How do you spell that?
- Tyler: B-r-o-c-t-o-n.
- DePue: And where is Brocton High School?
- Tyler: Brocton High School is ten miles north of Redmon.
- DePue: Is there a town of Brocton?
- Tyler: Yes.
- DePue: So you went to a consolidated school.
- Tyler: Edgar County Community Unit No. 2.
- DePue: This is one of those traditional names for all of these Illinois schools, and Illinois has a ton of these little places.
- Tyler: Yeah. Brocton [High School] is no longer in existence. The junior high kids from Brocton would be bused down to Redmon for junior high, and all of the high school kids from Redmon and the surrounding area would be bused to Brocton. Brocton and Young America then subsequently, after I graduated and before my brother was in high school, consolidated to Shiloh. Shiloh's now right off of thirty-six [Route 36] between Newman and Young America, I think it is, just across from Young America.
- DePue: How many students were in your graduating class?
- Tyler: We had the largest class in the high school's history, all twenty-five of us. (both laugh)
- DePue: Bob, what's the advantage and what's the disadvantage of being in a class that size?
- Tyler: You got personal attention, and you got personal attention.
- DePue: Both the good and the bad of it.

- Tyler: The advantage is you had personal attention, and the disadvantage is you couldn't get away with anything.
- DePue: It sounded like you've answered that question before. (Tyler laughs)
- DePue: What did you do in high school? You mentioned playing on the basketball team. I can see where there's plenty of opportunities to play sports.
- Tyler: Well, they didn't have a football team. I played baseball during baseball season. I played basketball the first couple of years. [I] wasn't good enough, and I didn't get my growth spurt in my freshman-sophomore year. So that left me a little short and a little pudgy. Running up and down the basketball court with a lot of tall guys didn't work out well, but I ended up being the... what do you want to call it? The kind of the... Oh, in baseball it would be the bat boy. But kind of the—
- DePue: The manager?
- Tyler: Yeah, kind of the manager for the team and all that sort of stuff, picking up the stuff and doing that. I did that certainly for my senior year and probably part of my junior year as well. Like I said, I was a catcher on the baseball team; I played baseball, involved in school plays in both my junior and senior year when we did those things and had great fun with those.
- DePue: Do you remember what parts you played?
- Tyler: I played Luigi in the senior play. That was kind of a leading role, and I got to take the curtain calls.
- DePue: Luigi being? What play?
- Tyler: Luigi. I don't remember what the play was. I could probably go look it up in a yearbook for you. It was a fun play. We had lots of fun with it.

Of course, my junior and senior year, I was big enough then to work for farmers that Dad knew and whatever else. So, spring and fall the schedule, (as typical of rural high schools, accommodated us to be able to have the guys... We couldn't get away with it now because of time in school, and it's gender specific. But you would have all of the shop or the PE [Physical Education] or all that sort of stuff in the afternoon.

You'd come in and take your heavy courses, and then at noon, when everybody would break for lunch, all of the guys would jump out and go running out and jump in the two and a half ton trucks with the stake bed back

ends on them, made by Midwest, which is the place I worked after my sophomore year of college, Midwest Truck Bodies in Paris.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, all the farmers had those little stake bed trucks. We'd run out, and those of us that were fifteen and didn't have a driver's license yet were allowed, at the time, to drive in Illinois, if you were driving farm implements or farm whatever. All of these stake bed trucks would have a bale of hay thrown in the back, so we were hauling hay.

We'd jump in these trucks, and we'd come revving out of the parking lot in low low, making all of the noise in the world, going all of a mile and a half an hour (laughs) and go heading off in the afternoon to spend the afternoon and the early evening in the field, plowing or harvesting or whatever else the need was, if we were running late.

I don't see school kids now having a schedule that allows that to happen, but we did that in those times of year. We all took the same courses. You kind of all took chemistry, and you kind of all took physics. I guess some of the guys didn't, but it seems like a class as small as ours was, you almost all took the same things. I didn't take shop. There must have been shop that was offered to others who didn't take some other stuff. I was on, certainly, the college track.

Oh, the other thing I did, I played in the band. I was the first trumpet for both my junior and senior years. We got some state honors, as a band, for a small school. That was good as well.

DePue: You certainly had a busy time in school.

Tyler: Tried to keep busy.

DePue: I'm surprised that you said, "We all took physics."

Tyler: I think we did; it seemed like we all did. It seemed like, at least all the kids I ran with out of my big class of twenty-five, always seemed to be in the algebra course and took chemistry and took physics. I know some of the guys didn't, but it seemed like we all took the same courses.

DePue: Those all seem to be college track courses. The things that you didn't mention are just as illuminating on who you are perhaps, because you didn't mention history or English or social studies or speech or—

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<sup>1</sup> Side stakes, around the truck bed, are how stake body trucks got their name. Stake body trucks are used by companies, small businesses and fleets that haul materials of varying sizes. From tall loads to loose loads, a stake body truck can accommodate almost any type of material. (<https://www.allegheny-trucks.com/stake-body-commercial-trucks/>)

Tyler: Well yeah, I took two years of Latin from my English teacher. Then I took two years of Spanish from a different Spanish teacher. Our English teacher was a great teacher, Mrs. Walters. She came in, and we had a contest amongst the students, because she wore a different outfit every day. We waited to see if she ever wore the same pair of shoes twice, and we never saw her duplicate her shoes.

DePue: Were these costumes, or was it just that she was extremely well-dressed?

Tyler: She was extremely well-dressed. She was a little old school teacher; she probably could have retired. But yeah, I did English, and she was good. But since she also taught Latin, I credit her with a lot of my grammar that I've since, to some extent, maybe forgotten. She was a real grammarian when it came to doing English and writing and doing that sort of stuff. But yeah, I was clearly on a college track. I'm sure there were some of the guys that took shop instead of physics, but it seemed like all of us were in the same college track courses.

DePue: Did you feel like you got a good education, even though it was such a small school?

Tyler: I thought I got a very good high school education. My English and grammar prep was very good. I ran off to Michigan Tech because I got... Whatever my prep was, it was good enough to get me accepted to MIT [Massachusetts Technological Institute], Arizona State, and Michigan Technological University, and Rose Polytechnic Institute as well.

DePue: Had you taken college tests at the time, the ACT or SAT?

Tyler: Well yeah, I took the ACT or the SAT, whichever one Illinois was using at the time. I don't remember what the score was, how poorly I did. And you noted, all those schools were a long way away from Illinois? I just wanted to go somewhere and I—

DePue: You already had traveled half way around the Midwest. (Tyler laughs)

Tyler: That's right. But my prep was good enough to get me high enough in the SAT scores and look good enough that those schools were willing to accept me. I got in to a program at Michigan Tech to get a master's, a five-year program for a master's in nuclear physics. That lasted for all of about two years, when I really decided I didn't like being stuck in a laboratory. I liked being around people a little bit more. I wanted to look at something else.

As in one of the articles I gave you, that I wrote for the American Psychological Association, I was a troubled student in a troubled time and didn't quite know what to do. As I didn't write in that article, but I told you earlier, my grade point was inversely proportional to the depth of the snow on the school ski slopes. So I'd go from one dean's list, in the early fall, of being

a good guy to the other dean's list, for not being in class enough. (both laugh)  
I got out of Michigan Tech after two years.

DePue: Where's Michigan Tech?

Tyler: Houghton, Michigan, on the Keweenaw Peninsula of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, up north of Wisconsin, up in the middle of Lake Superior, up where the smelt run.

DePue: Kind of a hard place to get to, wasn't it?

Tyler: Yeah, but it's not that hard. All you got to do is get on U.S. 41, and just keep going north.

DePue: What year did you graduate from high school?

Tyler: Graduated from high school in 1965.

DePue: I want to ask you a couple more questions about the high school years. This is just kind of a memory drill as much as anything, especially considering what you're going to be doing with your life afterwards. Do you remember the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall of sixty-two? You might have been a freshman or a sophomore about that time.

Tyler: I remember the Cuban Missile Crisis. Don't remember drills under the seat or drills jumping under the desk or any of that sort of stuff. I'm sure we probably did that, but I remember those only from seeing it in TV's and other things. I don't remember any big angst about it. I remember watching it in the news a little bit, but it wasn't a big deal. Next, you're going to ask me about Kennedy.

DePue: I am.

Tyler: Okay. I was sitting in Mr. Sullivan's chemistry class when the news came to town or came to the school. And typical of teenagers at the time and being pseudo politicians, if you will, the gallows humor was getting a little out of hand, and Mr. Sullivan kind of said, "Okay, time out guys. This is serious business." But yeah, I do remember the Kennedy, and like I said, I was in his chemistry class, in the middle of a lecture, during that.

DePue: Does it seem possible now that, looking back, that we just passed the sixtieth anniversary of that event?

Tyler: Well I'm still having trouble figuring out that my wife is old enough to have a son who is retired from the Army. (both laugh)

DePue: I would hope that you're old enough to have that same distinction.

Tyler: (laughs)

DePue: Speaking of Carol, you mentioned that you met her. Can you give us a little bit more about how that happened?

Tyler: I can.

DePue: Junior year in high school?

Tyler: Actually senior year in high school. Butch and I were running around together. He was dating a girl from my high school. When you go to little high schools in the middle of nowhere, the big deal at the time was to try and get invited to Paris High School's prom. So, the game plan Butch and I conjured up—

DePue: This is your idea of a big city.

Tyler: This is a big city, when you're coming from Redmon, remember, or Brocton, class of twenty-five, Paris is big time. So Butch and I had figured out a way. He was obviously going to get to the Brocton prom because his girlfriend was going to Brocton, and she would invite him. And for me to get to the Paris prom, I had to find some girl willing to invite me to the prom. Carol had been kind of dating this guy, Roger, for a long time, and they had broken up. But nobody—because Roger was a football player and one of the good guys on campus—none of the other guys would invite her out, out of respect for Roger.

Butch comes up with this brilliant idea. “Well, Carol Albrecht's down there. She's good, you know. Maybe you call her up.” I knew Carol from play practice because I would go in and see Butch at play practice. He was in plays in Paris, so we had met. I knew her. I called her up. Christmas break of 1964, Carol Albrecht and Bob Tyler went on the date from hell. I picked her up. We got in my little Volkswagen Beetle and, typical of the time, we would go from Paris to either Champaign or Terre Haute. You'd do a movie, and then go for the obligatory sandwich at some drive-in or whatever. Then you'd go home.

Unbeknownst to me, Carol was coming down with the chickenpox, and she was miserable. She sat there, staring out the window of the side of the car, grumbling about how I drove, how she didn't want anything to eat. It was just... Like I said, it was the date from hell. [I] drop her off, try to call her the next day. By the next day, she'd broken out in all sorts of the chickenpox stuff, bad case of chickenpox. Her mother, the nurse, wouldn't let her come to the phone. That goes on for a couple of weeks. Being the “see the hill; take the hill” kind of high school kid, who was on a mission to get a date for the prom, if she's not going to talk to me, I'm not going to see her. I'm not going to call her.

So Butch and I set about to get another date for the prom [and] succeeded in doing that. And then, after both of us graduated, I actually worked for a summer at Zenith, and I worked for her dad. She worked at Zenith at the same time. I didn't take her out. I didn't ask her out. We might sit and talk a little bit on breaks a little bit, but I was chasing the other skirts, instead of Carol's. (laughs)

It was two years into college, when I was up at Michigan Tech and I came down for a Christmas break in... That would have been sixty-six, before sixty-seven. I called her up because I was having a little gathering for New Year's, and said, "Hey, want to get together?" "Sure." We did. We happened to be dancing at New Year's Eve at the stroke of midnight, and it was the kiss that just kind of lasted. We ended up getting married in sixty-eight then. I ran off in the Marine Corps in August of sixty-seven.

I dropped out of school in sixty-seven and went to work for a period of time at Midwest Truck Body, over the summertime. Midwest was about eight blocks from Carol's house, so I would leave work, drive by, stop and say "Hi," then go home. [I] got to spend lots of time with her. She was going to Eastern at the time.

DePue: Eastern Illinois University in Charleston?

Tyler: Eastern Illinois at Charleston. We got engaged on her birthday in sixty-seven. I had enlisted in August of sixty-seven. Because I'd had an injury in the factory, a small injury and you had some stitches, they wouldn't take me. So, I was on delayed entry plan, and I went to boot camp in November. We got engaged that September, and then she married—dumbest thing she ever did—but she married a private on boot leave, when I came back in March of sixty-eight.



*Private Robert and Mrs. Carol Tyler on their wedding day in March 1968 in Paris, Illinois.*

DePue: A small wedding or a big one?

Tyler: Small wedding, small wedding. Privates couldn't afford a big wedding.



DePue: In the Lutheran church?

Tyler: In the Lutheran church by Butch's dad. We ran off then. From there, we ran down to Jacksonville, Florida and did our things there.

DePue: I've got one question for you about this whole story that you've laid out. It all started with the date from hell.

Tyler: This all started with the date from hell.

DePue: So, why the next day were you so persistent in calling her up?

Tyler: I wanted to get to that prom. (both laugh)

DePue: It wasn't because of her charms on that first date? Careful how you answer this.

Tyler: No, not the first date. We had spent a lot of time and even after that, even when we weren't dating, we would send letters, and we would talk to each other on the phone. When I was up at Michigan Tech, I'd call her, and she'd occasionally call me. We would just spend time talking but not dating. We became just really good friends. We've said we kind of married our best friends. And that's kind of... In the Myers-Briggs, we're both the same Myers-Briggs [type] too, which makes it real tough on the kids.<sup>2</sup>

DePue: What are you teaching now?

Tyler: Psychology.

DePue: So, there's Myers-Briggs. Anybody who knows that personality profile has an instant understanding. The rest of us will be mystified by it, but I'm intrigued. What is your profile type on Myers-Briggs?

Tyler: ENTJ.

DePue: Can you give us a two-minute explanation of what that means?

Tyler: Extroverted, intuitive, thinking, judger.

DePue: The intuitive piece might require a little bit more explanation.

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<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) personality inventory is to make the theory of psychological types, described by Carl Jung, understandable and useful. The theory is that the seemingly random variation in behavior is quite orderly and consistent, due to the ways individuals use their perception and judgment. Preference in each of 4 categories assigns one of 16 personality types, expressed as a combination with four letters, to the test subject. (<https://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/home.htm?bhcp=1>)

- Tyler: Tend to look for the big picture of things, kind of look at the whole, as opposed to... Because the opposite of that is a sensor that is... I need to look at that... Is it an EN? Is it the S?
- DePue: I think it's S, yeah.
- Tyler: Yeah, it's the S with the N. The S is the sensor, which is the... oh, the tactile. I associate that with you have to touch it; you have to feel it, and all that sort of stuff, and intuitive.
- DePue: They want to know the facts.
- Tyler: They want to know the facts. Being a thinker-judger at the same time, I kind of want the facts. I don't care too much about the feeling side of it because I'm—
- DePue: Thinking versus feeling.
- Tyler: Thinking versus feeling. As I tell my students now, as cognitive psychology, "I don't care how you feel. I'm not a clinician; I don't care how you feel. I just care how you think." I'm so far off the page on the judging... "It's time to get it done. Let's go."
- DePue: Judges tend to be a tad bit more organized, and perceivers tend to be a little bit more live for the moment?
- Tyler: Oh, yes, perceivers never come to conclusions on anything. They just kind of just, "Oh yeah. There's always another option out there. There's another thing to go look at."
- DePue: Thinkers-judgers, they would fit well with an Air Force career, I would think.
- Tyler: Maybe an Air Force career, but they fit very well as a Marine Corps career. (laughs)
- DePue: Why did I say Air Force? Oh my gosh! Pilot!
- Tyler: (laughs) Probably because I fly, and you're looking at airplanes.
- DePue: The other thing I wanted to ask you about is, why Michigan Tech, if all these high-class schools—well, that's a terrible thing to say about Michigan Tech—but more prestigious schools had offered you admittance as well?
- Tyler: Because their program very specifically spelled out how to get a master's in nuclear physics in five years. The rest of them, you just did your bachelor's, and then you figured out where you wanted to go from there. It just sounded neat to me—Maybe it's part of the Cuban Missile Crisis at that point in time, I

don't know. It's a carryover from that—but being a nuclear physicist sounded cool.

DePue: That was your idea, not somebody else's suggestion?

Tyler: That was my idea. Probably suggested by teachers or whatever else. "Oh, you'd be good in..." You take those personality tests or whatever in high school, for placement or whatever, a little bit. And they say, "Well you'd be good at this," or "You'd be good at that." Yeah, it sounded cool to be a nuclear physicist.

DePue: You got there in the fall of sixty-five.

Tyler: Yep.

DePue: You left at what time?

Tyler: I left in the spring of sixty-seven.

DePue: The spring of sixty-seven. Now, what had been going on in the United States at that time is the increasing attention, especially on a lot of college campuses, to the Vietnam War.

Tyler: Uh-huh.

DePue: Were you paying any attention at all to that?

Tyler: Oh, we were paying big time attention. All the toots... That's what we called ourselves up at Michigan Tech; we were toots.

DePue: How would you spell "toots?"

Tyler: T-o-o-t-s. Toots, (both laugh) just like it sounds. We actually marched in support of the Americans' involvement in Vietnam. I was in ROTC, actually Air Force ROTC. That campus did not have anti-war protesting going on. If it had any protesting—and we had a couple of demonstrations—they ended up in panty raids afterwards. So, I don't know whether it was so much for that. (both laugh)

We'd march across the... There's a strait, and there's a portage with a lift bridge in the middle of it. We'd march over there to Suomi College, which was a private Lutheran college that had a lot of girls in it. Michigan Tech didn't have a lot of girls. [It had a] student body, at the time, of about 2,500, and I think we had 163 girls, or something like that, in it. It was not a target-rich environment. But Suomi had a lot of girls in it. We'd go over there and... If the locals found out that we were coming, they'd raise the drawbridge, so we couldn't get across the portage. (both laugh)

DePue: That's right out of the Middle Ages.

Tyler: Right out of the Middle Ages.

DePue: But all those students who are going there have draft deferments, by virtue of being in college at the time.

Tyler: Yep, um-hmm.

DePue: But that wasn't enough motivation for you to stick it out with the academics?

Tyler: I was really lost. I was doing okay. Physics was okay, and Gilly Boyd's smash lab was really a fun class.<sup>3</sup> Smash lab is really stress and strain and when things break. It's fun to break stuff and be authorized to do it (laughs). And the stuff was... It was kind of fun doing differential equations. I haven't used one since I left there, but—

DePue: Not everybody says it's fun doing differential equations.

Tyler: Those were the days tech had one of the early IBM computers. We all were taking computer programming, with the old punch cards—As the election a decade or so ago now and all the chad in Florida... I remember how much we protected those little punch cards and whatever.<sup>4</sup> I thought we'd gotten rid of all that stuff, but we hadn't obviously—and slide rules. In fact, in that drawer right by your knee, there's a slide rule. We can sit here and talk about how a slide rule works.

That was all fun stuff. And certainly, the ski slopes were really great. But figuring out what I wanted to do with myself and where I wanted to go, I knew I did not want to be locked in a laboratory doing research. That's what a nuclear physicist was going to end up doing. I was just going to be stuck there. I knew that wasn't it, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. So, I didn't "drop out" drop out in the spring. But I came home for the summer, and I'm working. I stopped in and saw this lying, low-life, scum-sucking recruiter. (both laugh)

DePue: Who you thought highly of at the time.

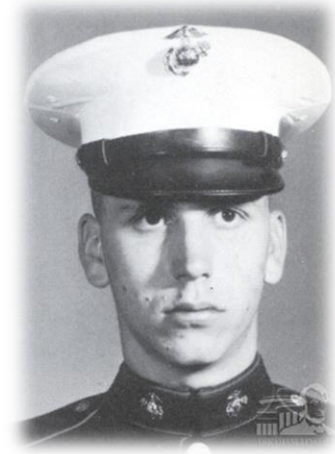
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<sup>3</sup> Professor G.W. Boyd's students referred to him as Gilly Boyd. He taught metallurgy, especially the stress lab. (Information provided by Robert Taylor following this interview.)

<sup>4</sup> In the 2000 United States presidential election, many Florida votes used Votomatic-style punched card ballots where incompletely punched holes resulted in partially punched chads, a "hanging chad", where one or more corners were still attached. These votes were not counted by the tabulating machines. The aftermath of the controversy caused the rapid discontinuance of punch card ballots in the United States. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chad\\_\(paper\)\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chad_(paper))))

Tyler: Who I thought highly of. He's walking around in his dress blues, looking good. He's got a quota to make because things are getting fired up in Southeast Asia.

He pulls out this nice little color brochure that explains that, with two years of college, a young man could sign on the line and go down and go to Pensacola and go through Officer Candidate School and flight school at the same time. When they got done with all that, he could get his gold bars on a Monday morning and get his gold wings on Tuesday morning and become a Marine Corps naval aviator. It was called the MarCad program.<sup>5</sup> The brochure had a nice picture of this guy dressed in his flight suit, with his G-suit on and his parachute harness and holding his helmet, with that big aviator grin on his face, standing in front of an F-4. And I says, "That's what I want."



*The standard Marine Corps photo of Robert Tyler during his Boot Camp in 1967, which he took in San Diego, California, Marine Corps Recruit Depot.*

DePue: Did the brochure have some fine print that explained how long it would actually take and the parameters involved?

Tyler: Well, I'm sure it did. But the interesting thing was that, after he talked me into that and we looked at everything and I did a preliminary physical and I did some testing and whatever else, I signed all the good stuff, and right then I even got to write in "aviation guaranteed." I says, "We're right on."

I go over to AAFES [Army Air Force Exchange], Indianapolis, for the armed forces induction center over there. After I went through the physical and after I raised my right hand in the air and said, "I do" and "I will," and all that sort of stuff, they hand me a set of orders that says, "Report to Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego."

I made the first mistake in my short Marine Corps career at that point in time. I says, "Hey, Sarge." It only happened to be a guy with three up and two down and crossed rifles, which is an E-7 gunnery sergeant. You don't call a gunny "Sarge," but I did. I said, "There seems to be a mistake here. I'm supposed to be going to Pensacola to flight school, and this says San Diego." He just looks at me and goes, "Ha, ha, fish." (both laugh) So I found myself in San Diego at Marine Corps Recruit Depot.

DePue: Another guy who had no sympathy; he wasn't a "feeler" at all.

<sup>5</sup> MarCad was a Marine aviation cadet program that ran from 1959 to 1968, for the training of naval aviators. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aviation\\_Cadet\\_Training\\_Program\\_\(USN\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aviation_Cadet_Training_Program_(USN)))

Tyler: Not at all. (both laugh)

DePue: Maybe when you signed “aviation,” that meant you could do any of a variety of different tasks that dealt with aviation; it didn’t necessarily have to be flying one of those things.

Tyler: That’s precisely what it was. I was guaranteed a position as an enlisted aviation maintainer of some sort and didn’t know what. They kept that part of the bargain. After I got through boot camp and ITR, Infantry Training Regiment, down at Camp Pendleton—humped up and down the hills out there—I was sent to Jacksonville, Florida, to Naval Air Station Jacksonville for Aviation Electrician school.

Along the way, I stopped off in Paris and married Carol and picked her up. We then ran off to Jacksonville, Florida.

DePue: I wanted to take a little bit more time and talk about some of this because Camp Pendleton, you’re basically going through the standard Marine Corps boot camp, just like everybody else.

Tyler: Every Marine is a rifleman, yes sir.

DePue: There are certain legends about that experience. What were your personal experiences?

Tyler: Having been through boot camp and having been through OCS, I think I can characterize it better by just saying, boot camp, I did things like complete the run; climb the rope; do the obstacle course, or whatever that needed to be done, because I knew if I didn’t, my DI [Drill Instructor] would kill me. There was no doubt in my mind, I was going to be dead. And boot camp’s hard.

Carol did a thing, when I was in Vietnam, and she was back finishing up her degree at Eastern, on semantics. The Marine Corps is really, really intentional about the semantics that they use, even today in this new crucible that we’ve added to recruit training and all that sort of stuff. But they’re very, very particular about the semantics they use. The first few weeks of boot camp, you’re never going to make it as a Marine; you’re just worthless. It’s a tear down time. It’s to get everybody back to the basic level.

Then the next few weeks are...putting an example out there, “Well, maybe someday you might get to this point. Maybe someday you’ll make a Marine. I don’t know, there might be hope for you yet” kind of thing. You’re working on teamwork, and you’re working on building up the individual. Then towards the end, you really put the goal out there, and you really set them up a little bit more. And we’ve added now the crucible to them, which gives them some confidence and some other things and permanently tattoos the eagle, globe, and anchor, if you will, on their soul in the process.

But boot camp is tough, and Carol says adversity bonds. The teamwork that comes out of that experience. That eleven weeks or now twelve weeks, I guess it is, is a strong one that has fascinated me over the what, forty, fifty years now that I've been running around, associated with these guys. On Long Island, for instance, after I got out, you would see Marine Corps stickers on all the cars, on Marine Corps cars. You don't tend to see Army stickers. I could probably ask you pointedly, you got an "Army Strong" sticker on your car?

DePue: Nope.

Tyler: There's already a Marine Corps sticker—you saw it—on the back of my new toy.

DePue: That you've had for what, one week?

Tyler: Not even a week. Tomorrow will be one week.

DePue: And I did notice the sticker.

Tyler: You did notice the sticker, and there's a Marine Corps flag flying on our flag pole.

DePue: You might want to mention what the toy is.

Tyler: Oh, the toy's a brand new 2014 Corvette Stingray. It's the third one. I got the first one when my wife finally understood that a Corvette was cheaper than an airplane. I should have used that argument earlier. (both laugh) Think about it.

So, boot camp is hard. Looking back on it now, as a senior officer, and understanding the training and all that sort of stuff was different than when you're going through the process. My DI was convinced that he wanted each of us, as we got through with our training and everything else, that he says, "When you go over in Vietnam, and Charlie comes up, and he hits you, or he does something, you can look at him and go, 'Ha, ha,' expletive, expletive, expletive. 'My DI did worse to me than that in boot camp.'" That was kind of the mindset of what was going on at that time.

But I can tell you, years later—and I'll come back to the boot camp/OCS contrast in a second—years later, as a young captain, actually a senior captain, I had landed my 130 [KC-130 aircraft] in Kaneohe Bay, and I needed some work from the defuelers/refuelers because we had an engine problem. I had to take fuel off the airplane before I put it back on, get it started, and do some other stuff. I went over to the defuelers because we just couldn't get a truck over. It was lunch time, and things just weren't going well, and my crew day was running out. I go over, and I look, there on the name tag, "R. M. Monroe" That's a master sergeant, and I say [to myself], Hmm, I wonder.

About that time, I look out at this guy walking across the yard or the grass, coming into the work shed there. He had that walk. You never forget the walk of your DI. You can see him in the middle of the night; you know it's your DI, and you don't want to be doing anything wrong. I just looked at him, and I said, "Master Sergeant Monroe." "Yes, sir." "Were you ever on the grinder at San Diego?" "Ah, yes sir. Why?" "Were you Second Battalion?" "Yes, sir. Why are you asking, sir?" "Did you ever have Platoon 2218?" "Yes, sir. Why?" "I'm one of your nerds." (both laugh) He looks at me, and he says, "Congratulations."

I mean to tell you, that master sergeant had his... He just pumped up, introduced me to all of his troops. "This is one of my recruits. This is what I want you guys to do." He could not get that truck out there and provide me any better service at that point in time. There's that connection.

The contrast thing, when I was at OCS—that was only about two years later—here I am, a young lance corporal going through OCS, and the contrast... It became frustrating because the goals are so different. In boot camp it's about creating seventy-four followers. In OCS it's trying to develop seventy-four, if you will, or a platoon full of leaders, individual leaders. In OCS, every time you started to see somebody emerge as a leader, that was in a candidate position kind of thing, a leadership position, then the staff would scramble it up. They'd make things come unpuckered and everything else. That became very frustrating because I had had all this training to be a unified team, and now we're being very divisive in how we're doing stuff.

The other thing in OCS, the worst that could happen to you, the very worst thing that could happen to you, was you'd get a straggler's chit. You didn't get extra PT [physical training]. You didn't get anybody thumping you. You didn't get any public humiliation. You didn't get somebody really yelling at your face. You got a little bit of yelling, but not much. "Okay candidates, you're just too weak. Here's your straggler's chits." So many straggler's chits, you were out. So, if you didn't want to make a run, who cares? All the sergeant instructor's going to do is write a chit. Like I said, in boot camp I knew I was going to be dead if I didn't do something. There, the worst I knew was I was going to get a straggler's chit.

So, what you ended up doing was figuring out for yourself where your mettle was. You dug into yourself to find the strength, to find the perseverance, to do any of that other sort of stuff. You learned more about your own depth of tenacity or resilience or any of those other highfaluting words we may want to use. That was the difference I see.

Boot camp was about creating a bunch of followers that are cohesive and indoctrinated in Marine Corps heritage and love the Corps and all that sort of stuff. OCS is about understanding your duty and responsibility as a



commissioned officer to lead those young Marines and have the fortitude and integrity and whatever else to do that.

DePue: Were there people that were washing out of boot camp while you were there?

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: What happened to those?

Tyler: They went home. Some of them got recycled, and they would go to casual platoon and then come back in. Others that couldn't hack it, they were sent home.<sup>6</sup>

DePue: But during the Vietnam War, some people would consider that to be an award, better to go home than to go to Vietnam.

Tyler: Yeah, yeah. But see, the Marine Corps, even at that point in time, we were still running...I believe the numbers will say about 92 percent of us were **still** volunteers.

DePue: This is in sixty-seven?

Tyler: Sixty-seven.

DePue: That's prior to Tet.<sup>7</sup>

Tyler: Prior to Tet.

DePue: Do you remember some of the derogatory terms they called you guys in boot camp? Nerd must have been one of them.

Tyler: Well, yeah, that was one of the nicer ones. The language was pretty colorful. I don't remember... We were... girls. We liked girls a lot. We were called girls a lot, as demeaning. Early on we just couldn't hack it and "You babies and cry babies." [I] don't remember any really, really... We had Big Bodaciou... We were going to send Bodacious in because he was made the platoon guide, assistant platoon sergeant, because he was big.<sup>8</sup> He was going to be the enforcer. (DePue laughs) But no, I don't remember a lot of personal

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<sup>6</sup> Casual Platoon is pretty much like being in the fleet. You get paid and pretty much do odd jobs around base until your court martial. (<https://forum.freeadvice.com/threads/what-happens-in-the-casual-platoon-for-ua-marines.491006/>)

<sup>7</sup> In late January 1968, during the lunar new year (or "Tet") holiday, North Vietnamese and communist Viet Cong forces launched a coordinated attack against a number of targets in South Vietnam, known as the Tet Offensive. (<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/tet>)

<sup>8</sup> The platoon guide was the recruit who carried the platoon standard and marched at the front of the platoon. (Information provided by Bob Tyler following this interview.)

derogatory names, other than just, “Okay girls, hippity-hop, mob stop,” that kind of stuff, but not really demeaning.

DePue: Since you obviously have thought about this a lot, did the group despise the drill sergeant or were in awe of the drill sergeant or both?

Tyler: (sighs) Of the four DIs that we had... The DIs each play a role; you kind of know that. One of the DIs is always seen to be the approachable one. The senior DI certainly tries to keep himself above the fray, but everybody seemed to really respect him. He had a way of doing it. One of the DIs was always approachable.

Then we had one that got relieved along the way because he was just malicious. He would come up and squeeze your Adam’s apple or whatever, just do things that... He got power hungry. As a senior officer, I would now look at it and say—both as a senior officer and as a psychologist—he couldn’t deal with the power gradient and got power hungry. The platoon **really** didn’t like him and were very relieved when, a third of the way through our training, he was taken off the grinder.

He was removed and relieved of duty. He just disappeared one day. And my guess is the senior DI... If I were to go back and rewrite it now, knowing what I know about the Marine Corps and how it works, he didn’t cut it. He was a young corporal. This was his first platoon. He didn’t handle it right, so they probably sent him back to DI school to be recycled or sent him back to the fleet.

You had some of them that... I certainly respected the gunny. Like I said, when I saw him walking across the thing, “Thanks a bunch.” And he was pleased that I had done what I had done. That was good.

DePue: Was it at boot camp that you all got stamped with this concept that the last thing a Marine does is leave his buddy behind?

Tyler: That was very clear. In boot camp that’s... It’s one for all, and all for one. You spend the time on a platoon street reading the little red book that has the history of the Corps and being tested on that and knowing it. And the history of the Corps talks about those things. It talks about—

Since then, talking with guys like the commandant at the time, Carl Mundy, he talks about Marines don’t fight for God, country, corps, or whatever else; they really fight for the guy sitting beside him, their buddy. I think Clausewitz [Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz, a Prussian general and military theorist] would hold that as a truism as well.

But we don’t often talk about that. You can put up all the grandiose things and maybe why you sign up and maybe why you go off, in the Civil

War terms, “to go see the elephant.” But when it comes down to getting out of your foxhole and going up the hill, you’re doing it to take care of your buddy.

DePue: It’s not irrelevant in the subject that we’re going to get to, about the Vietnam War, where so many people going into it have very mixed emotions, if not downright disdain or dislike of the whole mission that the military is fighting at the time. That’s more philosophical than I intended to get, but I am fascinated by your look at it here, after all these years. Again, you’ve obviously thought about it a lot. Is there anything else that the typical Marine is really stamped with by the time he gets done with basic?

Tyler: There is one thing that really stamps them that has fascinated me when I was a commanding officer and even later on and even looking at it in retirement. A Marine knows when they’re doing something wrong. You can stand out on the flying bridge in a hangar—you know what that is; that’s that second deck of the hangar, the second floor for anybody who doesn’t know what second deck is, that overlooks the hangar—and you can watch the one Marine that’s out there walking around, doing something that he hadn’t ought to be doing. Or you can be out on the grinder somewhere and halfway across the—

DePue: What’s the grinder?

Tyler: Grinder, parade field, parade deck or whatever. And you can see the one guy, out ditty bopping along or doesn’t have his cover on or is doing something, and all you got to do is go, “Hey, Marine.” The guys doing what they’re supposed to be doing keep right on going, but the one who’s messing up will stop and turn and look, okay?

If you want to catch a Marine short, when he’s doing something he hadn’t ought to do, all you got to do is say, “Marine’s just don’t do that. That’s not in keeping with the tradition of the Marine Corps.” That means flipping somebody off when you’re driving down the road, a road rage thing or something else. You can pull a former Marine back into good order and discipline, just by saying, “This isn’t in keeping with the traditions of our Corps.” That comes in boot camp. I don’t know how we do it, but that starts there. I can look at the guys that I’ve hauled out and said, “We don’t do that.”

DePue: I rarely make observations, but I’ll make an observation here. I think the Marines, by far, do a better job of teaching and stressing traditions than the rest of the services do.

Tyler: We have an advantage. I know I’m talking to an Army officer, and I am sensitive to not bragging about my corps at the expense of your service, as well, and my son’s and where I went to flight school. But we have it easier, as Marines, to do that because we are small. And when you are small, you can be more cohesive.

If you look at the Army units... Take the armored division when they used to wear their Stetsons and their spurs all the time, great, great camaraderie, great thing. Talk about an airborne guy; talk about somebody in the 101st or the 82<sup>nd</sup>, and you go down and you walk around Fort Bragg, "Airborne, Sir." There's great pride. There's great history and tradition in those specific units.

When you talk about the Army at large, it's a large land army. It's got problems being coordinated within itself that are harder to manage than 200,000 Marines. You can get a tighter grip on them and keep a tighter grip on them. And we've had the advantage of being thrown into some of those little fracasés in places where you can build a history that we can tell the story that sounds good. It's kind of hard to tell the story of some big land battle. But it's... I don't know quite how the Marine Corps pulled it off, but you've got that.

DePue: We're looking at the picture of the flag raising at the Battle of Iwo Jima.

Tyler: Yeah, and that's a Marine Corps story. But look at the number of troops that went ashore there that were out of Army divisions in that landing, as well.

DePue: Not at Iwo Jima. Okinawa there were some.

Tyler: Yeah, Okinawa there was a lot, yeah.

DePue: Iwo Jima was purely—

Tyler: Yeah, that's true; that's true. You guys were involved in Okinawa. You were involved in some of the Pacific campaigns as well. You were involved in Normandy. We have a better way of getting the press on some of that. I don't know why; we just do. And I'll take it. (laughs)

DePue: What did your parents think about your decision to (Tyler laughs) join the Marine Corps?

Tyler: Well—

DePue: Especially your dad had to be thinking, "Oh my gosh." But he had a frame of reference to be thinking about it.

Tyler: He had a frame of reference. He alleged it was the dumbest thing I had ever done. "You did what? You went down and **enlisted**?"

DePue: Oh, this was an after the fact thing. You didn't—

Tyler: Oh, I didn't ask. I didn't go, "Mommy, may I?" I just went down and did it. "You did what?" "Yep, I did." It was funny. Dad was... I wouldn't say he was mad, but he was not a happy camper.

I go off to OCS, and I come back as a second lieutenant. I guess he had had some problems with ninety-day wonders when he was in the Air Force and didn't think much of second lieutenants. So, there was no bragging about young son lieutenant running around. I'm in Hawaii. I get selected for captain, and I pin them on. I get on the phone, and I dial home. I called collect, and he answered. I says... I called collect and, "This is Captain Bob Tyler calling collect." He says, "Captain, huh?" And when I came back on leave, he could not show me off more than dragging me around to all of his buds at the restaurant for a piece of pie in the morning and a cup of coffee, "This is my son. He's a captain in the Marines." "This is my son. He's a captain in the Marines." So, the transition—

In sixty-seven, that was the dumbest thing I ever did. In sixty-nine, I was a shave tail lieutenant, and he didn't want... He wasn't going to brag about that at all. But by the time I came back, in seventy-five, as a captain... He'd had some really good experiences with captains, with a captain in particular in the motor pool. That made, I guess, all the difference. That was an interesting transition to watch.

DePue: The other important person in your life, by sixty-seven, sounds like it would have been Carol.

Tyler: She was.

DePue: What did she think about that decision?

Tyler: As she says, when I signed up, and we weren't engaged yet, and I signed up, and I said, "I enlisted in the Marine Corps today." She says, "Marine Corps, okay. I've heard of that. It's a government thing. I've got two uncles that work for the Post Office. Okay, that's the U.S. government. We'll be okay. Okay." (laughs)

DePue: Did you work hard to relieve her of her ignorance on the Marine Corps?

Tyler: She's probably one of the best Marine Corps recruiters around. She uses much of Marine Corps... As a teacher, some of the concepts about class management, leadership, leadership by example, all those kinds of things that come from the conversations around the table and whatever else, end up in the conversations around the dinner table as well and different places that we went. So, she started to understand the Marine Corps role, even early on in Jacksonville.

The Marines took great pride in their brides that would come to pick them up because that was back in the days... I don't know, are you familiar with liberty cards?

DePue: Yes.

Tyler: Okay. As an enlisted guy, liberty was sounded, and you got your liberty card, and then you could go home. Well, the wives would line up, park their cars out there, waiting for the liberty to sound, and then we'd go home. You couldn't go until after field day or whatever was done and all that sort of stuff. It was long before cell phones. You could look out... The Marines would look out in the barracks and look down and go, "That's a Navy wife." "That's a Marine wife" because Marine wives were always looking a little bit better, dressed just a little bit trimmer, proper, and just looked a little bit better pulled together. I don't know whether it's really true or not, but we really thought that you could tell the difference, and most of the time we were right, okay?

Don't you dare go by with your hair just up in curlers; you make sure it's combed. You've got to look right because you're a Marine wife; you're not one of these squid wives. (both laugh) So that became part of it. The night I was commissioned... She came back while I was in OCS for another semester at Eastern. She came out for graduation with her two black eyes—that's another story—and her eyes matched her dress.

DePue: It wasn't a fashion statement, I assume.

Tyler: Not a fashion statement. She had fallen on the ice at Eastern, into a door upright and several stitches on her forehead, eyes swelled shut and black and blue. So, we were down to just the two NFL black stripes under the eye when she shows up for graduation. I'm in OCS; I had nothing to do with that (both laugh).



*In February 1969, Carol Tyler pinned on Bob's 2nd lieutenant bars during his commissioning ceremony at Quantico, Virginia. She sported twin black eyes from a mishap with a door at Eastern Illinois University. The next stop for Lieutenant Tyler was flight school.*

That night, I was so wound up that I'm just talking about being an officer of Marines and leadership and all that sort of stuff, and she nods off. I'm just going, "Okay, whatever." By the time I got to Vietnam and certainly in Vietnam, it was very clear because we didn't hold anything back... My letters back, on a daily basis, would talk about what we were doing and what was happening, not in gory detail necessarily. But if I'd taken fire that day or I'd had some holes punched in my airplane, she knew about it a week later, when the mail got to her. We didn't hide that. She understood that the Marine Corps was not the U.S. Postal Service.

DePue: I did want to take another step back here. You've talked quite a bit about getting to OCS; I don't know if that would be the term that's applicable here.

Tyler: That works.

DePue: But there are some interim steps between ending basic training and then having the opportunity to go get your commission.

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: Tell us about those.

Tyler: Boot camp, infantry training regiment, sent to Jacksonville to be an aviation electrician and going through the training there of learning how to wire helicopters, jet airplanes, chase electrons around, do the electrician thing on aviation stuff.

DePue: Is this a Marine school?

Tyler: It's a Navy school because the Navy... All Marine Corps aviation is naval aviation. Therefore, our training is done at naval facilities. That's why we go to naval flight school. Our Marines go to Memphis and NATC, Naval Air Training Command, for their training. Jacksonville, Florida happened to have aviation ordnance and aviation electrician training at that time. I don't know what they have now, but at that time they had those.

I was in a class—I think it was a four or five month class—for being able to read an ohm meter and an amp meter and understanding how not to electrocute myself and how to be able to wire things and learn all of that stuff.

DePue: This is prior to getting married though.

Tyler: No, I was married at that time.

DePue: And was Carol down there?

Tyler: She was there with us. We rented a trailer for the first couple of months in the flight path of NAS Jacksonville. Then we moved to an apartment on the other side of town that was a little bit nicer.

I'm in there and doing that, motivated. And because I had two years of college, and there was this thing called Vietnam going on somewhere in the world, they were looking for slightly more mature, young Marines. I qualified at that because I was nineteen or twenty at the time now. And by being married, my perspective had changed a little bit with that. And being a good Marine, we had started our family by that... We had one in the oven, shall we say? (laughs) So, you're starting to grow up pretty fast then, all of a sudden, when you start looking at that.

Carol was doing some substitute teaching, down in the Duval County school system down there and was experiencing that large city schools are not quite the same as Edgar County schools.

DePue: I imagine. What grade level was she teaching?

Tyler: Whatever substitute they threw her into. I think—

DePue: This was the public-school system?

Tyler: Public school system. They asked if I wanted to apply for the enlisted commissioning program, and I said, “Yeah, I can do that.” So, I fill out the paperwork because that’s kind of where I wanted to go anyway. The Marine Corps was looking for, basically, second lieutenants to feed the... Second lieutenants don’t have much longevity a lot of times in ground combat situations, so we needed to keep young lieutenants in the pipeline. I said, “Yeah, I can do that.”

DePue: They don’t describe it in those terms though; do they?

Tyler: No, they don’t describe it in those terms. “You want to be an officer?” “You want to go to whatever?” At that point in time, I was also trying to get in to flight school. So, I had to pass a flight physical as well, and I did.

DePue: What time was this?

Tyler: This was sixty-seven. This was... No, it was sixty-eight; this is sixty-eight.

DePue: This probably would have been right after Tet or around that time.

Tyler: Yeah, summertime. This was summertime or so.

DePue: So, it’s clear that the war in Vietnam is not going well by then.

Tyler: That is true; that is true. But I knew at that time... I did not sign up for being a wing wiper, work on the airplanes; I wanted to fly them. That had been my goal since probably about eight years old or so. Certainly, by the time I was twelve or thirteen, I knew I wanted... I think Carol was bragging to somebody the other day that in my mother’s baby book—the baby book my mother got for me—when I was eight or nine, one of my goals or whatever was that I wanted to be a pilot, flying F-101s at the time. That was the thing. That had been a goal for a long, long time, and the only way to get there was to be an officer. So when they offered me that, I said, “We’re going to try it.” We applied, and it went up.

As I told you before, one of the interesting things... It’s one of those things that you always come back to, every time I’ve had to write an evaluation of somebody else and give somebody an endorsement. You never



know really what a person's potential is. You might think you do, but you really got to think about it, because the board that I sat in front of... Of course, the board's all officers, so you got a lieutenant and a captain and a major and a lieutenant colonel. They all sit there, and they ask you all these questions.

As a young, married PFC, I didn't have the money to have a newspaper; I didn't own a TV. So current events... When I got drilled about the current events and the domino theory and all that sort of stuff... domino theory? You got dominoes? (DePue laughs) I wasn't plugged into all that. So, the endorsement from the lieutenant colonel that headed the board—which I've always thought was interesting—was, "This individual does not have the characteristics necessary to become an officer of Marines." That was on the endorsement that went forward. I've got a copy of it somewhere; I could show you. I found that interesting because somewhere or other he got overruled, up the chain. Of the six of us that went to OCS, I'm the only one that lasted more than a year as an officer.

DePue: Do you think his lack of endorsement had to do with your relative ignorance at the time, shall we say?

Tyler: Yeah, I think so, my performance at the interview. At the time I was the number one student in my class. In fact, that's another little anecdote. Technically, the warrant for corporal was filled out three times for me, and I never wore the stripes. It got filled out the first time, and by the time I was then on ECP [Emergency Commissioning Program] hold, because they were waiting for determination of that. They says, "Oh, he's on a hold." They viewed that as a legal hold, tore it up. "You can't give it to him." because I was the honor graduate. [They] tore it up.

The next month, the board comes up again. They sit there and say, "No, he was... He's doing a good job here doing all this other stuff, we're going to do it." "No, he's still on a hold." They tore it up again. The next month, they reviewed it, and they looked at it and said, "Yeah, okay, we can give it to him." I had just checked out of the unit.

So, I'm now at OCS. I graduate from OCS. I'm now over at the Basic School. Marines don't have fancy names for their schools, the Basic School for second lieutenants. I'm out there, and we're out at Upshur in these old Quonset huts—

DePue: Upshur?

Tyler: Upshur, Camp Upshur at Marine Corps Base Quantico. It's out in the woods. We're doing our infantry training and second lieutenant training kind of stuff. I come back from the field, and I've got a rack [bunk] in there. Laying on my

rack is a warrant for corporal. I'm wearing butter bars by now, and I say, "I don't need this."<sup>9</sup> So I tear it up. (laughs)

What I should have done is gone back into the admin office, had them process it, correct my DD-215 at that time or 214, correct that to show it as such, and also give me the back pay from that, because that was a big pay jump in those days, from E-3 to E-4. But I was just... There's no way I need this corporal's warrant now. That's why you see, up on the board there, the little thing from my staff NCOs when I had the squadron, "To a lance corporal who did good," or whatever it is it says up there.

Every time I promoted as a CO [commanding officer], a young Marine to corporal, I said, "You've just done something I couldn't do." That gave me some street cred with the troops.

DePue: You graduated and got your commission at what time?

Tyler: February 1969.

DePue: I've got February 7; does that sound right?

Tyler: Second.

DePue: Second?

Tyler: Second—two, February sixty-nine. Date of rank is one, January of sixty-nine, but that's okay.

DePue: And then what?

Tyler: Then Basic School for six months.

DePue: So you went to **the** basic course.

Tyler: The Basic School, TBS, still there in Quantico, six months long.

DePue: That wasn't the commissioning.

Tyler: No, commissioning is the eleven weeks at OCS.

DePue: What did you call your basic training, simply that, basic training?

Tyler: No, OCS.

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<sup>9</sup> Butter bar or butterbar may refer to: Second lieutenant, a junior commissioned officer rank in the US Army, Air Force and Marines.

(<https://www.google.com/search?q=Butter+Bars+Marines&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiH7b3Kv63jAhVUOs0KHXeFCfgQ3rMBKAJ6BAgNEAc&biw=1280&bih=907>)

DePue: No, I mean the first one, Boot Camp.

Tyler: Boot Camp, Boot Camp.

DePue: No fancy name, just Boot Camp.

Tyler: Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Boot Camp. What's the little red book you've got there? What does it call it? Boot Camp, Recruit Depot, recruit training, Boot Camp.

DePue: Recruit Depot, that's what it says.

Tyler: It's the Recruit Depot, Boot Camp.

DePue: So, they don't knock themselves out making fancy names for this stuff.

Tyler: Not fancy names. It's Boot Camp. Every boot goes through it. And then you went to ITR because every Marine's a rifleman, so you went to Infantry Training, an ITR Infantry Training Regiment, and then OCS, Officer Candidate School. And then all Marine second lieutenants, including those that go to the Naval Academy, go to The Basic School.

DePue: And that starts in February of sixty-nine for you?

Tyler: That started in February of sixty-nine and lasted until July of sixty-nine. That's where you learned to be... I liken it now, as a crusty old colonel, as saying, it gives a lieutenant an opportunity to learn how to be a lieutenant.

Stop and think about it. You give somebody... You run them through Boot Camp or OCS or whatever it is. First of all, if I'm looking at an officer, I take somebody that's got a college graduate, so he knows everything, a piece of paper that hangs on your wall [and] says you know everything because you're a college graduate, right? And then—

DePue: I don't happen to believe that, but—

Tyler: But at twenty-four or twenty-two, or whatever, when you just got out of college, you've got this new piece of paper that says you're a college graduate. "I know it all."

DePue: And that's the same time you also think you're indestructible.

Tyler: That's right, so you've got that. Then you send them to some arduous training thing that says... They get great confidence that they can do anything. They can climb high hills, run fast, carry a pack, shoot, do all this sort of stuff. So, they know that they can do anything. We've built them up. Then we give them a piece of paper that says, "Special Trust and Confidence" and a commission from the president, "You have the authority to do anything." So, you know

everything; you know you can, and you've got the authority to do it. So, you got to temper that. You got to bring it down somehow.

Part of what The Basic School does is gives you the confidence of doing some troop leadership with your peers, doing skill sets and competencies, and being able to fire all of the weapons in the Marine Corps arsenal, being able to understand how to call in fires and do the skills of your stuff, and working with sergeants and staff NCO's so that you get to begin to develop that relationship of understanding. "Okay, lieutenant, you don't know it all. You'd better get the duty expert."

I think we do a pretty good job in that six months of helping the lieutenants learn to wear their bars. So that's what you do at The Basic School, and you spend quite a bit of time—

DePue: Is it strictly oriented around infantry training and tactics?

Tyler: Yes, and all of our supporting arms. Remember, even our infantry officers have to understand the Marine Corps MAGTF [Marine Air-Ground Task Force] concept. You've got the ground element, the air element, and the combat service support. For an infantry officer, they have to understand where they get their combat service support, where they get and how they call in and use air power. And for the same token then, any of us that go on to say aviation, that gives us an understanding of how we're going to support that.

DePue: I asked this question because I know this is very different from the Army approach, where you get your commission, and if you're going to be an aviator, you go to the Army Aviation School. I assume it works very much the same way in the Navy, that you go straight to Naval Aviation Training. And you're not learning how to be a grunt.

Tyler: Yeah.

DePue: Here's your opportunity to explain why you think it makes sense to do it the Marine Corps way.

Tyler: Two hundred and thirty-eight years of success.

DePue: Were you suggesting that the Army and the Navy don't have success?

Tyler: (laughs) Oh, putting words in my mouth now, sir. Well, it's the way we've done it since aviation and whatever in [the] 1912 timeframe and the integration of that. We have seen... First and foremost, Marines are an infantry unit. They're sea soldiers. They're sea launched, sea based, whatever, for the most part, because what? Ninety percent of whatever places we're going to go, we don't have access. We're going to have to come across the beach somewhere or another. It may not be a contested assault, but you're still

going to have to come across the beach; you're going to have to put in the fortifications, whatever else.

But we don't have—like the Army has—we don't have the heavy artillery. We don't have the number of tanks and the support and all that sort of stuff. We're light infantry, and we rely very heavily on the rest of it. But that connectedness to being an infantry officer or an infantry unit becomes integral. In Vietnam, grunts would talk about when they called Marine air. They would fly lower and drop their bombs closer. Marines will hang it out more to go get their Marines out of harm's way in our helicopters and medical evacuations or whatever else.

It comes back to that being small again. At 200,000, I know my Basic School classmates. I know my AWS. Strange things in AWS... That's Amphibious Warfare School for mid-level captains. We'll go back to that. So, you'd sit around a seminar, and we'd do the same thing at command and staff later on. You have ground officers; you have aviation officers; you have combat service support officers, all sitting around together doing their thing.

You don't think that much about it, but two years later I'm in Korea somewhere, and I need some support from somebody, and I'm landing there and, "Oh yeah. We're classmates from AWS." It's my grunt buddy. If I can jump ahead in the story line about forty years, one of the things I did when I was doing support for the Department of Defense in network-centric warfare was we looked at the impact of technology and smart phones or whatever you wanted, that Internet connectedness, to units like Seal Team Six, Striker Brigade, a Marine battalion, and Singapore, the city-state of Singapore. We looked at the effectiveness of how they did that. Singapore I can talk about more freely than I can the others, for obvious reasons.

What we discovered in all of these that was really evident in Singapore was those people in high positions... When the SARS epidemic came about, [they] could get on the phone and call, "Hey, Mark, can you do this for me?" even though it wasn't your area of responsibility, because they had universal conscription.<sup>10</sup> Everybody had done drill together; they had played golf together; they knew each other; they had a connection, so that when it came time to build a network to get things done, they could work together. The Marines do that in Basic School and AWS and by organization. I know my grunt brother. I know my ground service support guys.

So, when the defecation hits the rotary oscillator, we've already got a communication network going, and it works. I don't have to develop, "Okay, you're my armor guy. Where'd you come from? Who are you?" I think that's

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<sup>10</sup> Between November 2002 and July 2003, an outbreak of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in southern China caused an eventual 8,098 cases, resulting in 774 deaths reported in 37 countries, with the majority of cases in China and Hong Kong (9.6% fatality rate) according to the World Health Organization (WHO). ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Severe\\_acute\\_respiratory\\_syndrome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Severe_acute_respiratory_syndrome))

what makes the difference. That's a long-winded answer. I don't know whether—

DePue: So much of it sounds like it's a matter of being able to trust, because you've had the common experiences you mentioned before.

Tyler: Yes, yeah. I don't have to explain to a Marine grunt, or a Marine grunt doesn't have to explain to me, what it's like to hump a seventy-pound pack or whatever else. It's real hard to—

Carol walked into my hangar when I had the squadron one time, and the Air Force was hauling a bunch of Marines out. It's North Carolina; it's August, and they had a problem with their airplane. They just couldn't get there. So, here I've got a battalion of Marines, sitting out in the hot sun on a concrete thing, just hotter than the dickens. I'm standing around going "What's going on?"

About this time, some captain wanders through, and you've got these people around there. He made disparaging remarks about our sister service, about how they couldn't provide the taxi service that they had signed up for months before. He says, "I've got all these guys out here, and it's hot. Can I send them in a couple at a time to get some water?" I says, "What the hell are they doing sitting out in the sun? Bring them on in. Sit them along the side, just don't let them climb on the airplanes or get in the way. Get them out of the heat." because I understood the same taking care of your troops. He's got these troops in battle ready gear and everything else, and that's his job, to take care of them.

I don't think you see that in the other services, when it's only their job to fly the airplane and drive the airplane. Somebody else worries about maintaining it. I bring that back to, we've got this common bond. Long winded answer, Mark. I hope I got where you were going.

DePue: I'm taking the opportunity to allow you to talk about this because it's not every day that somebody has the current experiences you have in what you're teaching and haven't obviously thought about these things in great depth. It's a good experience to capture this. It's worth talking about for that reason only. There are lots of other reasons, but that's a great reason to do it.

Let's talk then about finally getting to what you really wanted to do, to fly an aircraft. When did that happen, and where did you go for that?

Tyler: I applied for and passed the physical and all that sort of stuff—

DePue: The flight physical?

Tyler: The flight physical, so that you could qualify to do that, while I was at The Basic School.

DePue: You're wearing glasses now. I'm curious; were you wearing glasses at that time?

Tyler: No. This is presbyopia, old age, the arms don't get long enough anymore.

DePue: You were twenty-twenty at the time.

Tyler: Yes, very much so. In fact, I had a near scare because I walked in—doing a night navigation drill at the Basic School—I walked into one of those loblolly pine branches, poked in my eye and scratched my eyeball. [I] thought that might have messed something up. It didn't, and I still got to Flight School.

I signed up for Flight School or applied for it. I was high enough in the academic standing at The Basic School to be able to do that and passed the other armed forces qualification tests on “Is this upside down, right side up?” spatial orientation kind of things. Did all that, had the grades, whatever, but the Naval Service and Navy Flight School in particular...

Well, first of all, I wasn't qualified to go to Jet School, particularly Air Force Flight School, because on my initial medical exam at AFFES, when it came down to hay fever, I checked “yes.” In retrospect, that's seasonal allergies to working in haylofts and all the dust. I would sneeze, and my eyes would water. I put down hay fever. Well, anything that's really hay fever hay fever for city slickers disqualifies you, because of all the sinuses and all that sort of stuff, particularly for jets. So, I had to do a little bit of talking with the flight surgeons and convincing them that I could really go be a helicopter pilot, if you didn't want to put me in that, that really, I don't have hay fever. I have seasonal allergic reaction to working in very, very dusty environments on a farm.

DePue: Was being assigned to be a helicopter pilot okay at that time?

Tyler: It was for me because, remember, I'm a Marine, and Marines **love** supporting their troops, their infantry guys. So that was perfectly fine to me. I know there's this stigma—in fact, my son was just talking about it, down in his job with Flight Safety International—the feeling that helicopter pilots are the ones with the lower grades in Flight School and the ones that really, you know... It's been my experience, having flown both helicopters and jets and large transports, that they all require specific skills. It becomes very Darwinian if you aren't smart enough to handle your machinery. He'll take care of you very quickly.

DePue: I've heard helicopter pilots try to argue that it's harder to learn how to fly a helicopter after flying a jet than it is vice versa.

Tyler: I would agree with that. I would agree with that. It's hard to break some of the fixed wing habits and do things like hover, because it's ingrained in you in

fixed wing that you never get below a certain speed because it'll stall and fall out of the sky. Helicopters do that all the time.

In jets you're moving along at 400, 500 knots or whatever, and things happen fast. But you're also at 40,000 feet. You've got a little bit of cushion for some of that stuff. In a helicopter, you may only be doing a 120 miles an hour, but your wings are slinging around at 400 knots, and when things come apart, they come apart very noticeably. You're a lot closer to the ground; you deal with the original aviators in the world [birds] a lot more, and we do not fly form on each other very well.

DePue: I don't know if you did this much, but there was also that concept of nap of the earth during that timeframe.

Tyler: In Vietnam, if I came back from some missions and I didn't have rice in my nose strut, I wasn't low enough. I have flown below treetops, with the rotor just above the trees, with the rest of the airplane below it. Yeah, been there, done that. Had to climb over the rice paddy dikes, and that becomes a necessary part of it.

But how I got there... I fought the battle, managed to get to helicopter training. The Naval Service did not have enough seats at Whiting Field to train the quantity of helicopter pilots necessary for the Marine Corps needs in country. So, they had a deal worked out that I could go to... Well, they ran about 200 Marine Corps Naval aviators through Army Flight School at Fort Wolters, Texas, and then did advanced training at Hunter-Stewart Army Air Field, Savannah, Georgia.

I checked in then. I got my orders and packed up Carol and our son in our fancy, little, new second lieutenant car, my sixty-nine Ford Mustang Mach I, and drove to Texas and checked into Mineral Wells, Texas, the town of Mineral Wells, right outside of Camp Wolters, now called Fort Wolters, now once again closed. [We] checked into the Holiday Inn. It must have been a little after supper or whatever, but it was evening time because it was dark out. As I pulled in to the parking lot of the Holiday Inn, a couple of my classmates came out. "Hey, Bob, come here see this," because it was July 22, 1969, which, as you'll recall, is another famous date, which was the day Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. I thought that was a... I can't believe she did that.

DePue: You've got your fax machine running here.

Tyler: No, that's... Carol's printing something. So, I checked in to Flight School at Fort Wolters, Texas on the day Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. I've thought that was very appropriate because I've bumped into Neil Armstrong several...well, two other times throughout my career and have his signature hanging on the wall upstairs. It's a nice bookend thing there. But got to Flight



School, flew TH-23s, which, if you've ever seen the TV series *Mash*, you will recognize that as the little bubble with the solid tail boom, and flew that—<sup>11</sup>

DePue: Not much room for passengers in that, was there?

Tyler: You could get three people in there, max. But I'm not a little guy, and my instructor was not a little guy, and on a hot July day in Texas, you could not get enough power at the beginning of your period of instruction, with the full gas tank, to get it into a hover. You had to do a running takeoff because it would not... The airplane is not that efficient in hot air. By the end of the class you could come back around and do some hovering, which meant you ended up learning your hovering skills and some of those other fine things. You had to be very gentle with them because it provided some super training.

There were days out there in Texas, with the wind blowing, that you could watch the traffic on the highway below you, on the interstate, actually going faster than you could, going in the same direction, because they were going seventy, and you were flying at seventy, but the wind was blowing at thirty. So they were passing you as you were flying. That was interesting training.

DePue: What were the skills that were necessary to be a successful helicopter pilot?

Tyler: What? Keen sense, steely eyed, (DePue laughs) nerves of steel.

DePue: Rarely do you have an opportunity to say this. (Tyler laughs)

Tyler: I don't know if there is a specific skill set. You've got to watch a lot of things. It's the mechanics of flying it. Any controlled movement of any control requires you to move all the other ones. As I was learning in the early days... It's a reciprocating engine in those things as well, so it's not a jet engine that has a speed monitoring system tied up to it. Your speed monitoring system was your left wrist and being able to crank what looks like a motorcycle throttle. You'd crank that, but if you rolled more throttle on it and you didn't pull power or pull the collective up, which changed the pitch of the blades—

DePue: With the same hand?

Tyler: With the same hand. So, it's a roll and pull. You had to do that because you had to put more resistance in the rotor, or it would over-speed. Once you got it up to speed, like the fans going up there, you had to roll it and pull. If you rolled it down, you had to push. But that also meant that your torque then changed. For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction, Newtonian physics, okay? I'm back to my Michigan Tech days already, right? That

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<sup>11</sup> M\*A\*S\*H, an acronym for Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, is an American war comedy-drama television series, based in Korea, that aired on CBS from 1972 to 1983. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M\\*A\\*S\\*H\\_\(TV\\_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M*A*S*H_(TV_series)))

meant, if you pulled the throttle, you had to move, depending on which helicopter, and I can't remember which one that one was, the anti-torque rotor, which is the little rotor in the back. You had to push either left peddle, when you pulled it up and right peddle when you pushed it down, or the other way around, depending on whether it's a push or pull rotor. You had to learn that in your airplane. That also meant, when you put more power on it and all that's going on, you've also got a ninety-degree change in the inertia of the rotor, which meant you had to move the cyclic. So, if you pulled power, you had to give it a little forward, and if you put it down, you had to give it a little aft, and you had to—

I literally sat in my living room, in our apartment, with a broom or a dust mop handle for practicing this, Rob's tricycle, so I could push sideways, and a vacuum cleaner handle here, between the cushions, just getting the push-pull-stomp...just getting the mechanics of that in my mind.

Little did I know, now when I talk about practice and connecting neurons in the brain to my students, as a psychologist, that what I was doing was laying down those memory pathways more efficiently than probably actually doing it over and over and over in the airplane, because I was forcing myself to think about and lay down that stuff.

So, the skill set you need is to be able to be one, very coordinated, and you've got to do a lot of multitasking. Those things don't have an autopilot on it. If you need to change a radio frequency, you've got to be able to put a lock on this, stick it under your knee, kind of hold it there, fly with the other hand, change the radio frequency, and come back.

DePue: Is that why, in most cases, you've got a pilot in there with you, a copilot?

Tyler: In the more sophisticated ones, yes, okay, but we still fly a lot of single piloted helicopters out there, running around. So that's not a... The larger helicopters require two pilots but the small observational ones—the ones you're familiar with, the Loach's, the light observational helicopters—are single pilot.

DePue: Having dreamt about this since you were just a little kid, was this all of what you expected it to be?

Tyler: Every bit as much. I'll tell you today, as I would have told you then, any day in the air is better than... A bad day in the air is better than a great day on the ground, anywhere.

DePue: What was Carol doing during this school?

Tyler: She was going to wives functions. She followed me to Fort Wolters. We lived in Mineral Wells, Texas. We actually lived in Weatherford, which is about twenty miles from Mineral Wells. It was a short school, so she was taking care of Rob, going to wives functions.

She's got some stories about here we are in these Quonset huts, and the Army officers, their wives are being taught that they had to show up at the general's reception with a hat and gloves and worrying about all sorts of the Army protocol. And the Marine wives kind of "Ahng, ahng, ahng, ahng" about that. (laughs). "I know how to act, and I don't need somebody to tell me how to dress." All of that—as we've called it over the years, and you're very familiar with it—is that genteel poverty kind of way of... We have this genteel nature in the officer corps, but we really aren't paid enough to be able to live the lifestyle of the southern belle and the plantation lifestyle and all that sort of stuff. But we do the best we can. (laughs)

DePue: Did she take to that herself?

Tyler: She's a great hostess, and she learned a lot of things in that...picked up guidance from that. Here again, that leadership by example thing. Other CO's that we've had have been... Their wives have been great examples on how you make welcome the officers and their ladies and other members of the organization as we've gone along. Her license plate on the car, on her car, is—and she picked it out when she got here—is "MY 32." That's because it's got the... Sorry, but it's got the Marine Corps license plate, and you've only got five spaces that you're allowed when you've got the eagle, globe and anchor on one side. So, she's got "MY" and then thirty-two, the numeral thirty-two. She's very big about saying, "It's **my** thirty-too," also, meaning the two as an also. She considers that this was our career.

She's got two plaques on the wall down there that are certificates for her contribution for leading the Officers Wives Club, for doing—sometimes pejoratively said—Mrs. Colonel kinds of things. She never wore my rank, but she took on the responsibility that the spouse of an officer has to do with the other spouses and all that sort of stuff.

She was very active in the Navy Relief Society, as a counselor and a recruiter for them and a public speaker for their efforts on providing financial services to our young sailors or Marines. She was a Donut Dolly for the Red Cross at Camp Lejeune, when we were there after Flight School, and at Hunter-Stewart, working as a Red Cross volunteer. She's a key person in running Key Wives Clubs and providing support.

In fact, when I'd given up the squadron, and I was just moving up to Headquarters Marine Corps when Saddam Hussein went stupid and ran into Kuwait, one of her biggest frustrations, expressed to me and others, but certainly to me, was she was bothered by the fact that she was not in a unit that was deploying or with those guys, that she was at headquarters, because there were wives now sitting around at Cherry Point and at El Toro and other Marine Corps bases, whose husbands are now deployed into combat, and they've never had... Because of that gap between Vietnam—with the exception of Grenada—and Kuwait, nobody had shot at us for twenty some

years. And she says... She, because she had the experience of having a husband in combat, she should have been there to help those younger wives understand how to deal with that. And she wasn't, because I was at headquarters.

DePue: I assume that when she was growing up, she didn't have the experience of moving around every couple of years, like you did in your early years. Was that something that was hard to overcome?

Tyler: She loves adventure. She loves building our... Every time we've moved, she does a plan to move and figure out what to do in the morning when we're driving across the country, where to stay and all that sort of stuff, how to make it an adventure for the kids.

We get to a new duty station, and it's checking in to see what's in the area because we know we're only going to be there for three years or less. So we've got to figure out what's here, and this is the experience. She's a museum junkie; she loves that stuff. In fact, in moving back to Decatur after all this time, we get here, and we get plugged in to things at Millikin, at the symphony, different things around here. We're talking to her cousins, who have lived here all their life, "Oh, we've never done that." "We've never seen this." "We've never done that." That part she's really like.

She was born in the Paris [Community] Hospital. Her mother worked in the Paris hospital as a nurse. Her dad worked in town. She lived in two houses in Paris her whole life. And then she marries me, and at the end of thirty years she had twenty-some different addresses (both laugh).

DePue: Let's keep moving on with your flight training experiences, because after the... I can't recall what you call all these things, the basic flight training that you got at—

Tyler: Fort Wolters.

DePue: Fort Wolters. What's next?

Tyler: Advanced Flight Training at Hunter-Stewart Airfield in Savannah, Georgia, with the Army again, where I ended up flying the other *Mash* helicopter, with the bubble with what looks like an oil rig boom, which is the TH-13, also reciprocating but a little more power and whatever else that we used for instrument training, and then—

DePue: For us novices, what's reciprocating mean?

Tyler: Reciprocating, like your car, pistons, reciprocating motor, air/oil or air/gas mixture, boom, fire, you know, pistons popping up and down, as opposed to the jet engine, which is a turbine engine. The last half of that training was Huey time, the UH-1, the popular workhorse for the Army in Vietnam. [I] got

training in that and finished up the instrument training there. And then completed—

DePue: Does that include flying instruments only?

Tyler: Yes, in the clouds. When they say instrument training, that means blind, as far as what you can see outside the airplane, reference to instruments only. Most of the Army graduates graduated with a tactical helicopter license, which just gave them VFR, Visual Flight Training, and emergency instrument training, as opposed to full IFR training, Instrument Flight Rule training, that all the Marines got, because that was a requirement. All Naval aviators have to have an instrument card. So we had more training, given by the Army in Army Flight School, than most of the Army officers got as they went through.



*Carol Tyler pins on First Lieutenant Robert Tyler's silver wings during his graduation from the Army's helicopter flight school at Hunter-Stewart Army Air Field in Savannah, Georgia in April 1970.*

DePue: What was the difference?  
Having to fly over water so much of the time?

Tyler: (sighs) Probably. My guess is... Yeah, probably over water at night, where you've got no visual horizon, as opposed to scud running in the Army's way of doing things.

So, we had the full instrument training in the Huey's, completed that, and then got my silver wings, just like I was an Army aviator. I got to wear those for a while and then went up the road to Marine Corps Air Station New River, which is the helicopter facility right adjacent to and on the edge of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

DePue: New River?

Tyler: New River.

DePue: Which was more significant to you at that time, getting the gold bar or getting the wings?

Tyler: Oh, I don't know. Being a lieutenant in the Marines was awfully important, Mark. That's a tough one. The silver wings were just kind of a step along the way, the silver wings, because I don't have my gold wings yet. I don't know, probably at that time, getting my wings was probably more of a goal completion than getting my commission. But the responsibilities—

The wings is a skill set and a job; the bars and the commission are responsibilities to our Marines. I think they fall in two different categories. So, when I look at which was more important to me as a personal goal, probably the wings. As a significance and a meaning kind of thing, that commission that hangs on the wall I think has more importance than the wings.

DePue: What did you do, once you finally got to a duty station?

Tyler: First of all, at New River I got introduced into the Marine Corps way of doing aviation. That is you're a Marine first, and you're an Aviator second. So, you had a ground duty, and I happened to be the classified material control officer. It was one of my duties, ground duties. I was in charge of all the stuff that the S-2 had locked up. At the same time, I was learning the CH-46, all its complexities and how it flies and learning all the course rules on how to fly it in the local area and everything else and getting checked out. Once I became what we call NATOPS qualified, NATOPS being the Naval Air... What's it stand for? NATOPS, *Naval Air Training and Operations Manual*. (laughs)

DePue: It sound like this is the kind of thing to put people asleep.

Tyler: That's, yeah... That tells you everything about how your airplane works and all that good stuff. I think—

DePue: But you were working on a CH-46, which is known to most people as—

Tyler: As a Sea Knight helicopter made by Boeing Vertol. The civilians call it a Sea Knight helicopter, and the Navy probably calls it the same thing. The Marines lovingly call it a Phrog, spelled P-H-R-O-G. We just call it a Phrog.

DePue: How is that different from the CH-47 Chinook?

Tyler: It's smaller, one; it's—

DePue: Because they look very similar.

Tyler: Unless you start looking at them. They're both twin rotors, and they're both interlocking, intermeshing rotors. The CH-46 has its engines internally, inside the airplane. The CH-47 has them on the outside of the airframe. The 47 has its fuel tanks that run the full length of the fuselage. It has four wheels, instead of the three wheels or three landing gear the 46 has. The 46 just has two little stub wings.

- DePue: The one we're looking at up here is the 46, I assume?
- Tyler: Yeah, um-hmm. The 47 has fuel tanks that run all the way along the side; it's bigger. The big significance in the difference between the two is, the 46 has blade fold and rotor brakes, so I can stop the rotors spinning, fold the rotors, so that I can put it below decks on helicopter.
- DePue: On an aircraft carrier.
- Tyler: On an aircraft carrier. That's also why the tricycle gear, as opposed to four landing gear, because it's more maneuverable on the decks and all that sort of stuff. But, I don't know, we learned to fly the 46 there, and when I got NATOPS qualified, then I was designated a Naval Aviator, and I got my gold wings and—
- DePue: So that's the significance of the gold wings, that you can fly off an aircraft carrier?
- Tyler: No, it says you're a naval aviator, as opposed to an Army aviator, and we all know naval aviators are better than Army aviators.
- DePue: We didn't all know that. Some people still don't know that (Tyler laughs).
- Tyler: Okay, well I can't find it today. Oh, there it is.
- DePue: And were you fine with flying a CH-46?
- Tyler: I loved it. It has one of the best missions in the Marine Corps. Yeah, I was designated Naval Aviator No. T13235 on 30 July 1970.
- DePue: If you'd had your druthers, before you found out what you were going to end up flying, what did you want to be flying?
- Tyler: My druthers? What timeframe you talking about? You talking about—
- DePue: Nineteen sixty-nine.
- Tyler: Nineteen sixty-nine. The Marine Corps did such a good job of indoctrinating me as a young lieutenant, it was my smart wife who talked me out of going to Vietnam as a second lieutenant infantry officer and going to flight school because I says, "I can always go over and tour as a grunt and then go to flight school." She says, "But if you go over and get hurt, you'll never fly, and that's been your dream all these years," because to me there is no better job for a Marine than being a second lieutenant in charge of a platoon in combat. When it came to "What do I want to fly?" I really wanted to fly something supporting my Marines. So, I was very happy going into 46s.
- DePue: But a Huey would have been good as well?

Tyler: Well, our Huey's are only command and control airplanes and some gunships. I really wanted the working bird. The 46, to the Marines, is what the Huey is to the Army. We're the ones that haul the troops; we do our medivacs; we do the civilian resupplies; we do the military resupplies; we do the inserts, whatever needs to be done. They're the working birds. They're not the ones... The big Sikorsky 53s are the ones that do the...from secure pos [position] to secure pos, move heavy weapons around, heavy externals, big list stuff. We're the guys that go into the crappy zones. We're the guys that somebody calls, "We need help," we're the ones who go help them.

DePue: But I also thought that, during the Vietnam War, a lot of the ground support missions that the Marines were flying were jets.

Tyler: As far as close air support for weapons and ordinance drops, yes.

DePue: Was that something you still were hoping that you could do?

Tyler: At that point in time, I didn't necessarily... You always want to fly the fastest and the highest and whatever. It's neat pushing throttles and doing things. But at that point in time, I was very pleased that I was flying 46s and the working bird helicopter thing for Marines and Marines in combat.

DePue: Did you feel like your temperament was well suited for that? It's another sociological question.

Tyler: Oh, that's one of those sociological questions. By that time I was so well indoctrinated that yeah, I guess so (laughs).

DePue: This might be a pretty decent place to end the discussion for today because from here on out, we're getting in to Vietnam, aren't we?

Tyler: Yeah, we're at the Vietnam spot.

DePue: So, if you don't mind, let's call it a day, and we'll pick this up next time with getting the word that you're heading to Nam.

Tyler: Okay, we can do that.

DePue: Thank you very much, Colonel.

Tyler: Thank you, sir.

(end of transcript #1)



Interview with Robert Tyler

# VRV-A-L-2013-2013-102.2

Interview #2: December 13, 2013

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, December 13, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This is my second session with Bob Tyler. Good morning, sir.

Tyler: Good morning, sir.

DePue: And how are you today?

Tyler: I'm doing well, thank you.

DePue: I know you've got a new garage door to protect your brand-new car (Tyler laughs).

Tyler: And a new printer because the other one died.

DePue: Last time we had a very interesting conversation. I especially enjoyed your analysis of what Marine Corps basic training is really all about. You had some great insights that will be useful. We got up to the point of just about getting you to Vietnam. I wanted to pick up where we left off. The unit that you're assigned to was... Is it HMM-264?

Tyler: Yeah, I was HMM-264 in New River, North Carolina. That's where I got my training in the 46 [CH-46]. Once I was fully trained and qualified, then I was assigned from the Second Marine Aircraft Wing, where 264 was to the First Marine Aircraft Wing that was deployed. The process—

DePue: They were already deployed?

Tyler: They were already deployed. They were gone; they were already there. So, what we were doing is, the units were there, and it was a... As opposed to unit rotation, in and out—which we have tried to go to more appropriately in more recent wars—we were doing individual replacements. The unit would stay in-country, and you'd just cycle people through, as opposed to running a unit through. We were trained in the States, got qualified.

I became an H-2P, which is a helicopter second pilot, in the H-46. Earned my gold wings there, and then at that point and time...As soon as I became NATOPS qualified, which is that piece of paper I gave you, NATOPS, the Naval Aviation Training and Standardization Program, qualified, then I was eligible for orders. As part of the replacement cycle, I was assigned to the First Marine Aircraft Wing.

[I] checked in to Okinawa, and at Okinawa you got eeny, meeny, miny, moe. Some of us stayed on Okinawa as First Marine Aircraft Wing Rear at Futenma and just did whatever there, cruising out of there and supporting the effort in-country. I got assigned in-country. When in-country, of course you got assigned to one of the—

At the time, at Da Nang, we had three working bird squadrons. Three sixty-five I think it was and 262, and there was another one that rotated out shortly after I got in-country. I was assigned to HMM-262, which is Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262.

DePue: So, what's the H stand for, helicopter?

Tyler: Helicopter, and MM is Marine Medium.

DePue: Helicopter Marine Medium.

Tyler: Medium, yes.

DePue: It doesn't necessarily roll off the tongue very well, does it?

Tyler: No, and that's why we say HMM-262 (laughs). That's because they're naval aircraft, because if this were a navy squadron, it would just be an H something or other. Like VT-6 is Fixed Wing Training Squadron 6 for the Navy. If it's a Marine squadron, like the squadron I commanded later on, VMGRT, you got the M in there for Marine. It's the same kind of thing.

DePue: I noticed the HMM, there's no S in this thing. There's no signification for being in a squadron.

Tyler: No, it's HMM because it's a helicopter, no squadron. I mean, it's HMM. It is a squadron just because it's helicopters.

DePue: What does that mean for the layman? How many people in a squadron? How many aircraft in a squadron?

Tyler: We were running, oh, in that squadron, as it was put out, eighteen to twenty-two aircraft. Depending on personnel, you're going to be running probably forty or so pilots and then air crew to support that. So, a total... You're probably running about 250, maybe 300, personnel in that unit.

DePue: You've got more pilots than you've got aircraft?

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: Is that pilot and copilot? That would be the same?

Tyler: You have more pilots than copilots, almost a two, two and a half to one aircraft ratio because you can fly the airplanes more than you can fly the pilots, the thinking is.

DePue: Did you always fly the same aircraft?

Tyler: Oh, no. You came in in the morning, and you got...morning or afternoon, whatever your flight was, and you were assigned an aircraft.

DePue: Before we actually get to your arrival in Vietnam, I had a couple of other questions. You were in Okinawa at what time, what month and year?

Tyler: I spent all of about four days on Okinawa, so I would have gone through there in probably October of 1970.

DePue: By that time, in the United States itself, the war's pretty unpopular.

Tyler: Very unpopular.

DePue: How much did you know about it? How much did you think about that aspect of going into the war?

Tyler: I thought all the weird college students on campus who were trying to figure out ways to get out of going to Vietnam and everything else were...and running off to Canada and doing other things...were maybe a little too



*First Lieutenant Tyler did a short stop-over at Okinawa in October 1970 while en route to South Vietnam. He is standing outside his BOQ, bachelor officer quarters.*

egocentric and only looking at what was going on in their own world and what was in their specific best interest. I thought what we were doing... As we talked about earlier, I didn't understand the domino theory (laughs) before I ran off to OCS and whatever else.<sup>12</sup> In Basic School and a couple of other things, as we started to look at it... As you look at—

You asked me about the Cuban Missile Crisis, and I don't remember much of that. But the Cold War was well in place and a lot of stuff was going on in that dynamic between two world powers, Russia and China and the communism and the United States. There seemed to be a fair amount of political paranoia about what was going on, I guess is a good way to look at it.

I actually thought that what we were doing made sense, as far as stopping the hegemony of the communist powers over there. Subsequent to that, in some of my readings and some of other lookings, I think we were a little naïve. If the French couldn't solve it, and others couldn't solve it in a long-time war that had been going on out there in that particular part of Asia, I'm not sure that we could. But at the time, I was pretty well convinced that what we were doing was making a difference, and it was making a difference on a global sense.

In retrospect, I still think that we gave that part of the world time to grow up and to develop themselves without some stuff going on. So, I still think that being there was the right thing.

DePue: We're going to be coming back to this a couple of times.

Tyler: Yeah, I figured you would.

DePue: I just wanted to make sure I knew where you were at the time. Had the Marines basically, for lack of a better term, indoctrinated you and other Marines about the attitude that you should take on that?

Tyler: Yeah. I've talked about that with others several times. I think the Marine Corps did a good job. We can call it indoctrination, or we can call it training. One of the things we tend to do in the Marine Corps is make sure that PFC Smuckatella and Lance Corporal Benots know why they're going to where they're going. We spent time doing that.

We had the leisure of time too because, once again, even in the heat of Vietnam, over 90 percent of the Marines were volunteers. So, we weren't on a two-year draftee, where you've got to train them up, get them up, get them in, and get them out. We had time to spend a little more time doing the indoctrination or at least explaining or getting everybody on the same sheet of

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<sup>12</sup> The domino theory was a Cold War policy that suggested a communist government in one nation would quickly lead to communist takeovers in neighboring states, each falling like a perfectly aligned row of dominos. (<https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/domino-theory>)

music on what was going on and why we were doing it. So, yeah, I think I was indoctrinated or at least schooled in the right way of thinking (laughs).

DePue: You were probably in Virginia, or at least knowing that you were heading over to Vietnam, when Kent State happened on May 4, 1970. Do you remember that?

Tyler: I remember a couple of things happened in that timeframe. That was also the time that Apollo 13 happened.<sup>13</sup> And the movie [*Apollo 13*] came out several years later and whatever else. I'm going, "I should have remembered that, and I don't remember that." That particular timeframe, when all that happened, I was in Savannah, Georgia. We were in the month-long slog-through-the-swamps-of-Georgia in our survival training. I had no TV; I had no radio; I had no newspaper. The world could have come to an end, and I wouldn't have known what was going on because I was slogging through the swamps in Georgia, learning how to E&E. So—

DePue: E&E, escape and evade.

Tyler: Escape and evade. Those two big events that took place around that timeframe, I didn't see in real time. So Kent State became one of those footnote things of what happened. Certainly when you have... In those days... If I say poorly trained guardsmen with armed weapons with lethal bullets in them and not rubber tipped bullets and whatever else and folks at the same...their peers, if you will, in age out there, I could see where they could get scared and end up cranking off a round when they shouldn't have, and stuff just gets out of hand. It was unfortunate, and that didn't help things at all either.

DePue: On the way to Vietnam, did you get a leave?

Tyler: I got leave. I'd sent Carol back earlier. Back in the days of Piedmont, our young son and her got on a Piedmont airplane and got as far as...I think it was Raleigh-Durham. they stopped to refuel or pick up some more passengers. the airplane broke, and she sat on the tarmac forever in the heat in North Carolina sun. She remembers that trip very well. She came back and did another semester, while she went back and finished up her bachelor's at Eastern, while I was in-country. She came back and was on a college campus. As you talk about Kent State and you talk about the unrest, here she was, living on a college campus with my second lieutenant car, with a Marine Corps sticker on the back of it, of course, and the officer sticker on the front of it, being very

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<sup>13</sup> Apollo 13 was the seventh crewed mission in the Apollo space program and the third intended to land on the Moon. The craft was launched on April 11, 1970, from the Kennedy Space Center, Florida, but the lunar landing was aborted after an oxygen tank exploded two days later, crippling the service module. Despite great hardship the crew returned safely to Earth on April 17, 1970. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo\\_13](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo_13))

careful where she parked it and who saw it and all that sort of stuff because of the college unrest.

She was very pleased that she was at Eastern because Eastern tended to not have the same amount of unrest that we had on other campuses. I don't think she ever really felt threatened the whole time that she was there, but she was very careful about where she was and whatever else, not to make it known that she was a military dependent at the time.



*Carol (Albrecht) Tyler in 1971, while a student at Eastern Illinois University. Her husband Bob was serving in Vietnam at the time.*

DePue: Did Eastern have an ROTC program?

Tyler: Oh yes, a very active ROTC program.

DePue: What did she think about you personally being shipped overseas?

Tyler: (sighs) I don't know what she thought (laughs).

DePue: By that time, she certainly would have known that flying helicopters in Vietnam wasn't necessarily the safest thing to be doing.

Tyler: Yeah, but the statistics, Mark, will tell you that actually flying helicopters, even over there, was safer than driving a car. So, depending on how you look at it, the statistics—and I don't like to bring those statistics up too often because they'll screw people out of their flight pay—but... (laughs) Yeah, it was probably safer there than walking one person ahead of the radio operator, as most second lieutenants and platoon commanders do.

Yeah, she knew from early on in our marriage that there would be times I'd be deployed, and I'd be deployed in harm's way. We talked about that. We talked about me going over as an infantry officer because I thought that was the best job for a Marine lieutenant. She talked me out of that, said I should really go to Flight School if that's where I wanted to go. She was wise, but she knew that I wanted to get where the cordite was.<sup>14</sup> She just knew that about me.

DePue: Let's actually get you to Vietnam. When did you arrive, and where did you land?

Tyler: Flew in on the Freedom Bird to Da Nang Air Field up in—

<sup>14</sup> Cordite is a family of smokeless propellants developed and produced in the United Kingdom since 1889 to replace gunpowder as a military propellant. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cordite>)

DePue: Freedom Bird means?

Tyler: Freedom Bird, coming out of country. I don't guess you can call it a Freedom Bird going in. But that was just the big old 707, a chartered airlines, TWA, I think, was the one that flew us. I know TWA flew me out. I don't remember who flew me in.

DePue: With stewardesses and the whole thing?

Tyler: Yeah. Flight attendants now, but in those days, they were stewardesses, yes sir. But, yeah, they would fly in, and they would land, refuel and take right back off. We landed at Da Nang. The Marines were at I-Corps, the northern part from the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] down past... We call it the Arizona Territory, and I don't remember what the river was that came through that province down there. That's where we were.

So, I flew into Da Nang, checked into the headquarters, spent two nights wondering when they were going to give me a weapon and a southeast Asia shack of some sort, getting all my survival gear, my ground... We call it 782 gear. I don't know what you're familiar with, but it's the flak jacket and the helmet and cartridge belt and all the stuff, short of the weapons. The units controlled the weapons. I didn't get any personal weapons until I got assigned to the squadron.

DePue: What were your initial impressions of Vietnam?

Tyler: It was hot; it was wet. I was obviously on a large base, lots of airplanes going on and everything else. Initial impressions... I landed; it was already nighttime, and it was dark, so you didn't get to see much. And then, when you got driven around in the back of the six-bys—the big old six wheeled trucks that you had—you didn't see much because most of the time they still had the canvas top on. You kind of rumbled around until you got to where you were supposed to. So, you were kind of kept on... I was on base.

I didn't get off the base until I got over to Marble Mountain. And then I was at Marble Mountain, and within about three, three and a half days I was checked into my squadron, checked into my little Quonset hut that had sandbag walls around it for blast protection, a bunker outside to run to, in case we got rocketed or mortared or all that good stuff. Got settled into life there. Life on the base was pretty decent, in Quonset huts. You ate breakfast, and if you were on base because you weren't flying, you'd have all three of your meals in the officers club. So you had real meals.

DePue: Were you paying for those meals?

Tyler: Oh yeah, you paid for them. You paid your subsistence. You gave up your subsistence for that or the MRE [Meals Ready to Eat] (laughs) that you took. Well, they weren't MREs. They were C-rats [C-rations] that you took along in the airplane. But you gave up your subsistence for all your meals.

Of course, in the evening the club was open, so you could have a drink or two and watch a movie. They showed a movie on an outdoor screen that overlooked the ocean there, because we were right by China Beach. The army had a recreation spot, just on the south side of Marble Mountain; it was China Beach.



*Marble Mountain as it appeared from the air in 1970. First Lieutenant Tyler flew out of the Marble Mountain Airfield, which is in the background. Marble Mountain was on the outskirts of Da Nang, South Vietnam.*

DePue: How far was Marble Mountain to the ocean?

Tyler: The air field sat on the edge; the beach was right there. It was right on either part of the Da Nang Harbor—and I'd have to look at a map specifically—but there was water and beach and stuff that was there. It was right there.

DePue: Did Vietnam have a smell to it that was different?

Tyler: (sighs) Oh, I don't know. Where I was most of the time the smell that I smelled around there was the smell of any large base camp, tents and sandbags and sand and smelly Marines (laughs) and dirty flight suits and oil and jet fuel. Those smells I remember more than the smell if I'd been stomping through the bush out there somewhere.

DePue: Much of your life, when you're not in combat, sounds like it was at Marble Mountain.

Tyler: Yeah, never got off the base.

DePue: How much exposure did you have with Vietnamese people?

Tyler: Vietnamese people... Because of the contract people we had, we had Vietnamese barbers; we had Vietnamese—

DePue: Male or female?



Tyler: Yes, okay? Some of both. We had female maids or whatever that would come through and clean quarters and clean clothes and do all that sort of stuff. You had Vietnamese working the mess hall and just other contract work around the base. They weren't working on aircraft; they weren't working on facilities and that sort of stuff, but they were doing services, like we kind of do almost any place we go. You know, we hire some of that stuff out.

DePue: Any concern about the kinds of Vietnamese who were coming on base?

Tyler: Yep. We had a couple of them that we caught pacing off distances for being able to help snap in, if you will, mortar rounds and whatever else. We caught a barber. In my time there we caught one barber; we caught one or two maids that were doing that sort of pacing and checking and whatever. We were **real** careful.

Carol sent me a copy of the paper she wrote on semantics, "The Semantics of Boot Camp." She was writing that while I was in-country. She sent me a copy of it. I left it on my desk, and it disappeared. I suspect it's in some cave somewhere; the NVA [North Vietnam Army] is using it for their own training. I don't know, but you just didn't leave that kind of stuff laying around, because it wouldn't stay.

DePue: I would assume that you could occasionally get off the base.

Tyler: Could but didn't. There was no reason to. Everything I needed was there.

DePue: I'm going to get blunt here. You had plenty of enlisted there as well, and maybe you didn't, but I would think the enlisted had reasons to get off base.

Tyler: Yeah. I was the education officer in the squadron because, as Marines, we're not just pilots, we also do the other stuff. I can truly say, Mark, I did not hear the troops that I flew with or the ones that I talked to about off-duty education—we were doing correspondence courses and that sort of stuff—I did not hear them talking about going out in the ville.<sup>15</sup> We had a pretty active Club. We'd bring in entertainment routinely—not nightly, not daily—but there was movies. There was entertainment in the club. I don't remember anybody talking about all the things that are usually right outside the gate, the kinds of things—

DePue: Like bars and pawn shops and prostitution houses and things like that?

Tyler: I did not hear and I was not aware of having to deal with any of those issues for us, right outside the gate. Now, the guys talked all the time about going on

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<sup>15</sup> A ville refers to a small village or group of huts in rural Vietnam. (<https://www.humbleisd.net/cms/lib/TX01001414/Centricity/Domain/5915/English%2090%20ttc%20glossary%20of%20terms.pdf>)

R&R somewhere.<sup>16</sup> If they went down to the Philippines—I knew what was right outside the gate at Olongapo (the Philippines), right outside Subic Bay—the guys would look for in-country R&R or whatever and the stories around those. But I did not catch stories of that kind of activity going on around Marble Mountain. It may have been going on around Da Nang, but I don't remember hearing, even my fixed wing buddies who were stationed out of Da Nang air strip, talking about that, which is an interesting thing when I stop to think about it.

I do not remember having to deal with it, as an officer in disciplinary kinds of things or the orders that we were writing or anything for the troops. I do not remember having that conversation about how do you control the behavior; how do you control the access? We didn't worry about liberty cards, and liberty cards would have been active at that point in time. Don't remember at all.

DePue: Do you remember going through VD [Venereal Disease] lectures or having to give VD lectures or insuring that the Marines had prophylactics when they left the base or things like that?

Tyler: I remember that we had those lectures certainly in Boot Camp, ITR [Infantry Training Regiment], pre-deployment lectures, pre-liberty lectures, when you've got somebody going out afloat [shipboard] but not routinely in-country. That wasn't a big thing until we were getting ready to go somewhere else.

DePue: How about drugs? Was that a problem?

Tyler: We were aware of drugs, and we were always on the alert for drugs with our troops, our Marines over there. I'm trying to remember when we started the urinalysis tests. I know we were doing them by the time we got to Hawaii. I'm not sure if they were started in-country yet. We were aware of all sorts of illegal drugs going through, and we were working very hard to control, if you will, that.

In a squadron you're dealing with a lot of people that fly, and flight surgeons are death on anything stronger than an aspirin; even an aspirin will ground you. So, awareness of any kind of drug or alcohol abuse... We'd laugh, "No smoking twelve hours before a flight and no drinking within fifty feet of the aircraft," obviously reversing the rules.

But when we had instances of somebody that clearly was badly hung over, because they had spent too much time the night before, gotten in an airplane, flew down somewhere—you got together your crew; you launched

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<sup>16</sup> R&R is a military abbreviation for "rest and recuperation" or "rest and relaxation."  
(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R&R>)

out; you did your thing, and you were down somewhere—we'd fly in a relief pilot and send the other guy back as a passenger.

DePue: Were there disciplinary measures as well?

Tyler: Depending on who it was (laughs). The one I remember the most happened to have been... The squadron commander had managed to stay out way too late the night before, and he was... Let's just say he was shiffazzed. He stumbled onto the airplane, the copilot—

We had a problem in Marine aviation and helicopters at the time—It goes back to “any fixed wing pilot can fly a helicopter” attitude—that we were having difficulty keeping career helicopter pilots going back for second and third tours. So they were forcing fixed wing pilots to transition. You would end up with senior aviators, with limited helicopter experience, being dumped out of their fixed wing community into the helicopter community to go command, if you will, or be the XO [Executive Officer] or the Ops O [Operations Officer] of a helicopter unit.

Well, we had one of those; actually I had a couple of those. The squadron CO [Commanding Officer] ended up, one particular night...just stayed up late, drinking with the buds and whatever else too much. It came time for the 5:00 brief, to come over and strap on an airplane and go down to be a forward based medevac unit—You'd run a medivac out of Da Nang, and you'd run a medivac out of Baldy.<sup>17</sup> He went down there and got into the medivac bunker and crashed. The copilot and the chase airplane called back and said, “You'd better send us some relief for the old man” (laughs). We flew another pilot down and poured the old man back onto the airplane and flew him back home.

But back to your question on the drugs, we knew there was drugs in the barracks. We knew there were drugs around. But we were rooting them out as best we could, every chance we could. And then the other thing, our guys could see what happened to others in the field that were using it.

New Year's Eve, I happened to be flying medivac, and I got called out for an emergency medivac for a group of young marines, sitting around celebrating the new year with a couple of joints and whatever and played Russian roulette with a grenade. Now, stop and think about it. There's only one chamber in a grenade; only one pin comes out. It's probably going to explode. It's not “You've got five empty chambers and only one bullet.”

So, when your crew goes out, and you've got... Yeah, you've got two officers that are your pilots, but you've also got the doc, and you got a crew chief, and you got two door gunners that are all living in the barracks. When

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<sup>17</sup> Baldy was a forward operating base/air strip, south of Da Nang, 15 minutes or so my helicopter. (Information provided by Bob Tyler following this interview.)

they come back and they talk about, “Can you believe those stupid idiots down there, getting high and playing Russian roulette with a grenade? And we had to go out in the middle of the night, out there in bad weather, to go pick them up?” It makes a difference for our guys a little bit. I think they saw some of that, and it kept some of that... I don’t want to be naïve, but I do think it did keep some of it down in our community.

DePue: What was the result of playing Russian roulette with a grenade?

Tyler: We picked up three emergency medivacs. They were pretty well screwed up, and we dropped them off at the hospital. Beyond that, I don’t know. I transported them.

DePue: You mentioned the crew. Can you go through that again for me, what the crew consisted of?

Tyler: You had, a pilot, a helicopter aircraft commander, a HAC. You had a copilot, H-2P. And for us, in the Marines, they’re always, at that point in time in history, were commissioned officers who also had ground duties. You had a crew chief who was a mechanic and could fix the airplane, work on the airplane, do that sort of stuff, but also was our eyes and ears in the back of the airplane, cleared us into zones, out of zones, did all that sort of stuff. And then we had two door gunners. We mounted fifty calibers out the windows of the 46, one out of the emergency escape hatch, which was there, and one on the other side, that window right there. [Indicates on photograph, the location of the mountings.]

DePue: So, both towards the front of the aircraft.

Tyler: The side of the airplane, out the side. They had mechanical stops, so that they wouldn’t go up and shoot your rotor blades and that you couldn’t shoot any of your stub wings, which had your fuel in it. Then, on a medivac mission, you’d have one or two corpsmen as well.

DePue: What was the normal lift capability? How many passengers, how much tonnage?

Tyler: (sighs) The total max gross weight of the aircraft was 23,000 pounds. The weight of it, that could be in fuel, the aircraft and/or what you were carrying internally or externally. How much you could carry would depend on the density altitude of the day, the temperature and all that sort of stuff.<sup>18</sup> The airplane was designed for about nineteen to twenty combat loaded troops. Most of the time we carried twelve to thirteen troops, Marines. We’d carry

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<sup>18</sup> The density altitude is the altitude, relative to standard atmospheric conditions at which the air density would be equal to the indicated air density at the place of observation. In other words, the density altitude is the air density given as a height above mean sea level. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Density\\_altitude](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Density_altitude))

more Vietnamese; they were lighter and smaller. For the most part, you'd figure twelve to fifteen is what we would carry.

DePue: That's a squad plus.

Tyler: A squad plus. And weight wise, I'd have to go back—those numbers are a long time ago—and figure out whether it carried. Four thousand pounds or so seems about right. That seems a little light though. I know we carried more than that in externals and other stuff.

DePue: Would you have been able to sling load a 105 howitzer?<sup>19</sup>

Tyler: I would probably have left that to the 53s. They carried all of those for us. I've slung load water buffaloes. I've slung load—

DePue: You might explain what a water buffalo was in military terms.

Tyler: A water buffalo is a (laughs) little wagon that's a tank, a small... When I say tank, I don't mean an Abrams Tank. I mean a water tank, an oversized 55-gallon drum, only a lot larger, that has water in it. Or we had water bladders too that looked like oversized donuts—I've got a funny story about that too—that you could sling underneath and take some place that has water. So, we hauled those. We'd haul like C-rats, those kinds of things, pallets of that out to the bases. Most of the time, most of the sling load stuff, when we were doing that, we tended to let the heavy loads go to the heavy lift squadrons, the CH-53s. Most of the stuff we carried internally, because it just made more sense. We could sling load an M151 Jeep, so you're talking a good 2,000, 3,000 pounds of cargo that you could haul that way.

DePue: I want you to discuss a little bit about the type of enemy that you faced in I-Corps sector, in your area of operation.

Tyler: (sighs) What we really saw... Because of the way we operated, we had... The threat to the helicopters was small arms fire, for the most part. I don't remember anybody having pocket rockets shot at them.<sup>20</sup> They tended to use the RPGs [Rocket Propelled Grenades] more, to shoot at the base. I don't remember, in my stay over there, anybody really worrying about anything other than green tracers coming up at them and small arms.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A sling load is any cargo carried beneath a helicopter and attached by a lead line and swivel. (<https://dictionary.university/Sling%20Load>)

<sup>20</sup> The term "pocket rocket," invented by the gun industry, has no standard definition. However, articles stress two salient points about this class of handgun: They are small enough to be easily concealed, and they feature higher caliber than other pistols of comparable size.

<sup>21</sup> Tracer ammunition (tracers) are bullets or cannon caliber projectiles that are built with a small Russian and Chinese tracer ammunition, which generates green light using barium salts. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tracer\\_ammunition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tracer_ammunition))

We had a couple of spots that we knew that we didn't want to go anywhere near, that had some AA in them. There was an AA battery, anti-aircraft battery, on the approach to Da Nang that lit up a couple of times. We sent, not we, but the Marines, sent somebody out to try and take that out because that is not good for 707s flying in, to have anti-aircraft going off at them.

The real threat to Marine aviation over there was, for the most part, small arms fires getting in and out of the places we were at, because the troops in the field were in close contact to either NVA regulars or the enemy that's trying to hide and evade and be elusive to what was there.

DePue: Did you have more Viet Cong or NVA in the sectors you were working in?

Tyler: We had both. We had Viet Cong, and we knew we had a lot of those. And because it was I-Corps and you had Khe Sahn, and you had the whole route coming down to Khe Sahn, through Laos and that border down through there, we had infiltration, and we had both. Remember, I didn't get eyeball to eyeball more than about three or four times with the guys that were shooting at me.

DePue: And that, I assume, was from 1,000 or 2,000 feet or something like that.

Tyler: Most of the time, when they were shooting at me, I was getting close to the ground, picking up something or dropping it. The times I got eyeball to eyeball with them were—

You land in a zone somewhere, and all of a sudden, a spider hole that's been camouflaged opens up, and the guy stands up, and he starts shooting at you with his AK-47. I've got a .38 snub nose, .38 at that (laughs), and it's not going to do any good at all. You're sitting there like this, and you really can't take your hands off the controls to play with that anyway. He's right over there.

Luckily for us, they had trained their young marksmen to shoot to lead the helicopter because helicopters always fly kind of like leading the duck, when you're duck shooting. You lead it and expect the airplane to fly into where you're shooting. He was tearing up the ground ten feet in front of my airplane with his AK-47.

DePue: But it's a losing proposition if that AK-47 is taking on a .50 caliber machine gun.

Tyler: At the time it wasn't taking on a .50 cal machine gun because where he was... Remember I told you it had those stops on it? It was against the stops.

DePue: So they knew that.

Tyler: I don't know whether he knew that. It was just the way we landed in the zone. That particular day, my crew chief then grabbed his M-16 and engaged the AK-47 through the crew entrance door because the .50 cal couldn't get to him.

DePue: How much did you work with ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], South Vietnamese regulars?

Tyler: Well, a couple of inserts. [We] didn't move that many ARVNs around. I know the infantry battalions and companies would be paired with some of them and were working with them. But as far as lifting them, didn't lift them that often but did occasionally. One of the things, certainly there, every time we did, we did a sweep of the airplane when they got off the airplane, because there were instances where they would do things, like take the pin out of a grenade and hide a grenade between the seat structure and the side of the airplane so that when the airplane went off and started shaking a little bit, it would fall down, and the grenade would open up and blow up the airplane out of the sky. So, we always swept the airplanes for those. Anytime you carried—

The Cong were good at infiltrating all sorts of organizations. We didn't have to worry about it so much because our fuel tanks were hard to open and get into. But you'd land some places, and you'd have kids swarm the airplane. Some of them were literally trained in how to open... It's kind of a flip top twist and whatever fuel tank. You'd take a grenade, pull the pin out, but you wrap it with some tape, drop it in the fuel tank, and the fuel kind of acts like an acid on that tape, and ten or fifteen minutes later the grenade goes off inside a fuel tank. It makes for a nice little explosion.

Didn't have any of those that I'm aware

of that happened while I was in-country, but we had been briefed on instances where that had taken place, or they had caught people in the process of doing that. So, we were careful about who got around our airplane and when they got around our airplane, that sort of stuff.



*Vietnamese children scatter as a helicopter approaches a Vietnamese village in the I-Corps sector, northwest of Da Nang. They were bringing medical and construction personnel in preparation for a county fair in 1971.*

DePue: Did all of that cause you to reflect and wonder about the nature of the enemy's resolve and what we were doing there in the first place?

Tyler: (sighs) You knew that the Cong was infiltrating and doing some of that stuff. My reflections of it, when I go back and I look through my log book, and I look at whatever we had, I probably carried more civilian medivacs than I did military medivacs.

The Marine Corps and I-Corps was very big in what we call "country fairs." We'd fly CBs and engineers out and do public works projects in the villes and that sort of stuff. We'd take corpsmen and doctors and dentists out and have a day or so and go back to these same villes and doing the hearts and mind stuff, taking care of the communities, building orphanages, doing all sorts of stuff like that in the ville.

I've had babies born on my airplane. We'd get called out because somebody's living and operating in and around a village, and some woman's having a breech birth and whatever else. So off we'd go at 2:00 in the morning for an emergency medivac, pick this civilian up to bring her to a hospital and ended up the corpsman delivering the baby on the airplane. When I look at that and I look at flying in the same area for the year that I was there—most of the year. It is a short tour, but for the most part of the time that I was there—going back and forth, you could see the people living and working in the communities that they lived in and worked in.

We were the last working bird squadron in-country. The other guys, the Purple Fox and the other squadron that was there, they left before we did. We were the last ones. As we left and the infantry units left and the patrolling and everything else came down, you could start to see little villages getting burned and getting blown up and stuff not happening in the rice paddies that was happening before.

You could see our perimeter, as it got smaller and smaller, we started taking more fire in different places that had been secure pos's [positions] for months. So, you kind of knew that, while we were there, we were making a difference for the normal peasant on the ground. I could see that, as we were coming out, how the nature of life for those people changed from what seemed to be pretty normal to not so good.

Towards the end of the tour, four of us one day ended up picking up 186 civilian medivacs from a little town by the name of Duc Duc. It sat kind of in the southwestern area of our operating area. We were the... I don't remember what package we were, but there was four of us; there was a division of us, and we kept going into this zone.

On the other side of the stream from the village, there were these "friendly woodcutters" in little brown uniforms, with packs and rifles, who



were taking little logs, because they were woodcutters, and putting them in these bigger logs. They would go “poof,” and they would go over, and they would land in the village. I guess the inertia, because they couldn’t have been mortars because these were “friendly woodcutters,” would explode. They were just blowing the dickens out of that village because that village had been sympathetic to the Marines and to the ARVN forces.

Because of the rules of engagement, they would not shoot at us. They would just blow the dickens out of the village, and we could not engage them. We could not shoot at them because they were “friendly woodcutters in the area—

DePue: Who was saying they were “friendly woodcutters?”

Tyler: That was what was reported back to headquarters. Those were “friendly woodcutters.”

DePue: So someone in the intelligence system—

Tyler: ...had determined that those were “friendly woodcutters.” So, we hauled, between the four of us, 186 civilian medivacs out to hospitals that were getting blown away that day. Did we make a difference over there? Yeah, we made a difference. At least in I- Corps, I could say we were making a difference in the daily life of those folks over there.

DePue: But it had to be maddening to you and your buddies about the “friendly woodcutters” and knowing what’s really going on (Tyler laughs).

Tyler: Yeah, yeah. And we called back to the Direct Air Support Center [DASC], and we asked permission. We could not get permission to engage or get permission to call in any kind of a strike on them.

DePue: When you first got there, were you a pilot or a copilot?

Tyler: I started out as a copilot because you have to have a certain amount of hours before you can become an aircraft commander. I didn’t have that many total hours, didn’t have that much experience in the airplane. So, you go along, and you start out, and you get a little bit of all the missions. But they start you out kind of easy, so you don’t scare yourself too badly, don’t do something too stupid.

My first mission was... It was the general’s chase. The bad guys had learned in I-Corps anyway, you don’t shoot at Hueys because, at the time, most of the Marine Corps’ Hueys were gunships. We were just getting a few of the Cobras, but most of our Hueys were used as gunships, with the exception of a couple of them that were the command and control birds the general or the regimental CO would use.

If the general wanted to go somewhere, because the Hueys that we were flying were single engine, he would have a 46 as a chase airplane. So, in case the Huey broke in flight or went down or had to make a precautionary landing or got shot down or any of that good stuff, we'd zoom in, pick the general up and fly him out. Then they'd worry about recovering the airplane and all that other sort of stuff afterwards.

So, I had the general's chase. Now the general's chase is a good deal mission because you got to go over to the wing headquarters landing pad. Your aircraft sat there all day, just in case the general wanted to go somewhere. So, you could have the chase mission that basically gave you a whole hour of flight time in the day, half an hour over to land and half an hour back at the end of the day. Or you could have a day that you would fly all over the place because the general went somewhere.

But you got to eat in the general's mess. And I didn't have the C-Rat can that had lobster salad sandwiches in it. It was **nice** to have lobster salad at the end of the table, and the general and the Colonels and all the heavies were down at the other end of the table. But it was kind of a nice reprieve from the sand and the grit and the world that we lived in, to go over and have that mission.

So, I'm flying along as the copilot, just a dumb old copilot, trucking along, chasing the general on my first mission in-country. The general that day had decided to go down and run around the Arizona territory. We're putzing along, and for some reason or another, the general wanted to take a lower look. So, he went down lower, and we were just dumb enough that we followed him down, below the 1,500 feet. Normally we stayed about 1,500 feet because that's out of small arms range. But the general wanted to take a lower look, so we came down too.

About that time, the left door gunner says, "We're taking fire from the 9:00." I'm sitting up in the front of the airplane, and I've got this inch thick or so armor-plated seat that I'm sitting on. It's got a back on it; it's got wings on both sides, and it's got a fold out wing that you can pull a pin and release, so you can do an emergency escape if you have to.

DePue: But essentially there's armor on the sides as well?

Tyler: On the side of my seat, not the airplane, other than some armor around the control closet and a couple of spots around where the engine compressor is. So, I'm sitting there. The aircraft commander was flying at the time and taking fire from the 9:00. So, what do I do? I lean forward and look over to see what it looks like (laughs). And I feel this hand grab me and slam me back in the seat and says, "You idiot. Why do you think they got armored seats in these things?"

But you look at it, and it's just nice little, white little firecrackers out there popping off. You can't hear it. They didn't hit anything, so it was no big deal. But after that, I says, "You know, that was pretty dumb, Bob. You hadn't ought to done that."

DePue: What would happen to the aircraft if you lost one of the two blades?

Tyler: Well, the 46 has six, so you're not going to lose—

DePue: But you got two rotors or two engines, do you not?

Tyler: Yeah, you got two engines, but they go into a single transmission in the aft, and it has a mix box that then sends it through a sync shaft across the top of the airplane, and they're intermeshed. It's like an egg beater.

DePue: So, are you saying that you wouldn't have an occasion where one of the rotor systems went out and the other one stopped working?

Tyler: Nope, nope.

DePue: That could get kind of ugly, couldn't it?

Tyler: That'd get real ugly real fast. The airplane comes apart in three pieces when it does that, forward section, aft section and center section.

DePue: What would happen if you lost all power?

Tyler: You'd auto-rotate, just like you do in any other helicopter. The reverse flow through the air, through the rotor system, keeps the rotor system engaged. You do a flat pitch thing or reduce the pitch on it, and it keeps your hydraulics pumping for you because it's all driven off of the transmission. Then you'd do a flare at the bottom, and hopefully you'd land. We like to say, any auto-rotation you can walk away from is a good one. Most of the time, the—

DePue: But it's not like a rock falling out of the sky.

Tyler: Not exactly. It comes down. It's a pretty steep descent, but it's kind of like the little Da Vinci toys and the maple leaf things that flutter down. You can look between your feet, and that's about where you're going to land. So, you're going to have probably maybe one to four ratio thereabouts of dropping down. You're going to be limited in how far you can go.

DePue: I'm assuming that you didn't have parachutes on the aircraft.

Tyler: Not normally, not normally.

DePue: Talk me through the various types of missions that you would go on.

Tyler: You had, certainly, like the chase mission that I talked about, where you would just go and follow a VIP or something out there. You had a lot of re-supply. We would end up taking cases of C-rats; water; ammunition, small arms ammunition, the M16, that kind of stuff to company CPs [Command Posts]. You've got a company in the field somewhere, they've got to be fed. So, you'd fly out and land in a rice paddy or a dry field or some clear opening somewhere, where the platoon or company, whatever was on patrol. You'd have re-supply. You'd also take in replacements that way, one or two people that would come in.



*A Marine infantryman radio operator talks to Tyler's co-pilot while they are 'in the zone (on the ground) during a resupply mission somewhere in I-Corps. circa 1971.*

You might have a day where you're taking a battalion CO around to his different command posts. You may need to pull in company commanders in for a meeting and then take them back out. You'd have those kinds of the re-supply missions. You'd do some re-supplies using externals. If you had a couple of company CPs somewhere, you might go out and take a couple of pallets of... The 53s would come in with big pallets, break them down into smaller pallets, and then we'd go out to the smaller operating posts.

DePue: What were the 53s?

Tyler: The CH-53, the big Sikorsky helicopter. They do the mission that the 47 does for the Army.

DePue: So, it's the equivalent of the 47.

Tyler: Yeah, but it's made by Sikorsky, and it's a CH-53. They would haul those around.

Then we'd do troop inserts, where you'd take... Most of the time we'd fly maybe a division, maybe two divisions of helicopters, and that's four aircraft in a division. Sections to a division is four. We had a standing mission eighty package that you would end up with four aircraft on standby all day long to be able to move rapid reaction forces. If somebody got in some serious business out somewhere, we could then move a whole company or a whole platoon. In a couple or three lifts, you could get a whole company on the ground, moving in somewhere. Those would typically go with a gun's package with you as well. You'd usually have a couple of sections of gunships. The Huey gunships or the Cobras would go with you. Depending on how big the operation was, you might have an OV-10 gunship with you.

If there was really something going on, and they really needed some suppressive fire, there might be some prep from some fast movers around. The F-4s and A-4s and A-6s would come in and prep the zones before we got there. Then they'd get out of the way, and the guys from VMO [Vendor Management Office], the Marine Fixed Wing Observation Squadron, which is where Scarface...which was our gunship Cobras. The OV-10 gunships would come because they could fly closer to our speed. They would then provide escort to us, while we would come down into a zone, drop off the combatants. Then we'd go out, and they'd come back in.

Then you would have medivac, where we always had... Unlike the Army that has a dedicated DUSTOFF [Dedicated Unhesitating Service to Our Fighting Forces] medivac unit, that was just one of the missions, and it would rotate between the squadrons. Every night the wing would send down what the missions are for the day, because remember we're supporting the ground troops. So, the ground troops' scheme and maneuver, whatever it was, what did they need for whatever? Those missions would come down to the wing operations center. They would work those with division, "Okay, we need so many helicopters. We need so much this. What are the air assets we have to do that?" That would be then passed in a fragmentary order down to the groups, the respective groups. At the time we were there, we were down basically to one group that was working that whole area of operations.

DePue: A group would be several squadrons?

Tyler: Several squadrons, yes. And the different types because the group we had had a heavy lift squadron, an HMH [Heavy Marine Helicopter squadron], had an observation gunship, so that would have been the VMO squadron. Had a couple of working birds, HMM squadrons since that was MAG-16 over there, at the time. Okay, those are the guys that got all that.

DePue: MAG-16 was the group?

Tyler: Marine Air Group-16, yeah. Then they'd send the order down, and then the frag [fragmentary] order would come in.<sup>22</sup> I'm digressing from the types of missions we had, but I think it explains how we got to them. Those fragmentary orders would come down, based on how many aircraft you still had available. They'd look at your aircraft availability, what you projected you could get fixed overnight and what you'd have available for the next day's mission. Then what we call an operations duty officer would sit there and write the schedule and would sit there and figure out who's going to fly what mission, put copilot with so and so.

I was the schedule writer for a couple, three months at the end of my tour. You'd sit there, and you would figure out who had had medivac, who had had whatever, who had been on the hairier missions and needed a milk run mission, so that you could rotate. You didn't put the same people on medivac all the time because medivac is not good flying, not good missions. You're out there where the bad guys are going to shoot at you. You're out there in bad weather. You don't have the same prep time to get ready to go somewhere. You had patches—I've got one upstairs I'm sure—“To Hell and Back, Night Medivac,” because you'd go out in the night and fly around in mountains without nav [navigation] aids, scud running under the bad weather to go pick up somebody that's just gotten shot because they're in contact, which means you're going to be a bigger target than they were. The schedule would come down; the frags would come down, and you'd figure out who was going to do all those.

The medivac package was always two working birds, a primary and a chase, in case the primary got shot down going into the zone, somebody was immediately there to be able to pull them out. And you had a gun package with them. So, you always launched four airplanes anytime there's a medivac because most of the time that meant it was a hot zone; it was not a friendly place to be.

Then you'd have recon, deep recon inserts, where you'd have, for us, force recon. You know them as Special Forces guys, Rangers that you could put in way behind the lines to go out looking around for something.

DePue: Army Rangers?

Tyler: You would know them as Army Rangers. I don't think I ever carried any Army Rangers, but our Force Recon, Marine Force Recon [Reconnaissance]. We'd put those in. We always had a package ready to pull those guys out. If they came in contact when they weren't supposed to get in contact, how do you get them out?

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<sup>22</sup> A frag order is an abbreviated form of an operation order (verbal, written or digital), usually issued on a day-to-day basis, that eliminates the need for restating information contained in a basic operation order. It may be issued in sections. ([https://www.militaryfactory.com/dictionary/military-terms-defined.asp?term\\_id=2227](https://www.militaryfactory.com/dictionary/military-terms-defined.asp?term_id=2227))

You'd go get them out with a gun package. If you couldn't get a landing zone, you'd either pull them out with a jungle penetrator or the SPIE rig. I don't remember what the acronym SPIE stands for [Special Patrol Insertion/Extraction], but it's that rope that goes out through the hell hole in the center bottom of the aircraft. It goes down and has D rings on it. It coils on the ground, so the guys click their D rings and their harnesses onto it. You come out at a high hover, and you fly away with them hanging out underneath the airplane. Not the way I want to ride and, of course. The problem with that is you're hovering out of ground effect.<sup>23</sup> It takes more power. If you lose an engine up there, you're in deep doo-doo, and you end up then [so] you can't hover to land these guys; you can't get them in the airplane. You've got to figure out some way to get them off the airplane.

DePue: I would assume also, in those kind of circumstances, they could very well have an injury, and then you'd have to land, would you not?

Tyler: You'd have to figure out some way at some point in time, but at least they're coming out. Better than sitting there with the jungle penetrator going up and down six times.<sup>24</sup> You can get six people on one rope at one time, get out, get away someplace and then either come to a hover or do something that gets them off.

You'd also do... Sometimes you'd take... I took a battle staff, the wing battle staff or the division staff, on a sight-seeing tour of troop deployments around Khe Sanh, where they just wanted to see where the troops were and where the forces were laid out and what the ground looked like and get a better view of the area.

Then, of course, we'd do the other things of taking the country fair folks out to do stuff, carry the ready-mix concrete in the airplane out and all that sort of stuff. So, we would do those kinds of missions as well.

And certainly around the Birthday Ball, or the Marine Corps Birthday, we would fly cakes to all of the major command posts or wherever we could get into a regular position because we'd fly the cakes out so the troops could gather around and celebrate the birthday and then fly the general in to have a little cake cutting ceremony later that afternoon.

DePue: I would think beer might be more important or valued than the cake, but—

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<sup>23</sup>Out of ground effect is a hover in clear air, i.e. above the rotor diameter from surface or above sloppy surfaces, forests etc. An air cushion does not build, and your hover depends only on the mass velocity of air flow downwards. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ground\\_effect\\_\(aerodynamics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ground_effect_(aerodynamics)))

<sup>24</sup> A jungle penetrator is a three-armed anchor-like seat, lowered by winch and cable from hovering helicopter, down through the jungle canopy, with the arms folded up against the cable to permit it to penetrate the vegetation. (<http://www.swampfox.info/miltermgloss/junglepen.html>)

Tyler: Yeah, that too. Interesting on that, some of the time the guys would get beer, but two things on that: I flew the cakes around in the morning, then I flew the general around in the afternoon. I flew into the 1-CP, Hill 55. They had put the cake under one of those kitchen flies, just one of the tents that just has just the roof, no side on it, and it was right next to the LZ [Landing Zone]. I'm sitting there as I'm coming in... I'd landed earlier, gave them the cake and thought they'd move the cake down the hill a little bit. They didn't. They had it under the kitchen fly.

So, we came trucking in with the general onboard. As I'm coming down, I'm going, "They didn't leave that cake right there. They surely didn't leave that cake right there." Of course, we come into a hover, and all the rotor wash kicks up all that dirt. So the white cake became that red, that pink mud from Vietnam, just all over. The general gets out, and they cut the cake. They go through the ceremony, and those guys ate it like it was the best cake since ever. So, we did that.

We had one time that we went in—I don't remember where we had been—but we went in, and we'd been spending the day, all day long, re-supplying these guys. On the last run of the day the guys come out, because they had taken a fire extinguisher and iced down some beers and handed them up to the air crew, thanking us for all that we had...for supplying them that day. Of course, as the division leader at the time and everything else, the guy says [to me], "Hey, would you like a beer?" "Oh, love one, but we can't drink them while we're flying." "Oh, there's always got to be a spoilsport somewhere." I says, "We can take them, but we can't drink them until we land back home." "Okay, that's fair." The guys on the ground were appreciative of what we were doing there.

DePue: Can you walk me through a typical day, where you had a mission, from the very beginning. I assume there's some kind of a mission brief?

Tyler: Yeah.

DePue: All the way through.

Tyler: Let's just take a re-supply. That's probably the easiest one to do. The schedule would come out, and as soon as the schedule would be done in the evening, it would be sent over to the officers club, because that's where everybody was. So everybody would know, "Okay, I'm on this mission" and what my brief time is. Then you'd show up in the ready room for the brief, and you'd get the mission brief. It's a standard, once again, NATOPS [Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization] brief: What's your mission? What's your flight? What aircraft do you have? The emergency question of the day, that you'd go over to keep yourself fresh, and all that sort of stuff. How you'd conduct yourself between you and the other pilot and all the crew brief. What kind of other airplanes are going to be with you? Where you going to go?



Where are you going to get gas? How long you going to be? All that, everything that attended to the mission. You'd review the maps. You'd look at the latest intel on where any new threats were, anything else were. You'd go out then.

The aircraft commander would go look at the aircraft log book, while the copilot would go out and start his walk around. The crew chief had already done a preflight on the airplane and opened up the airplane and all the inspection doors. So, you'd look at it, make sure it had the fuel on. The door gunners would go collect their weapons and get the .50 cal's mounted, get the ammunition, get all that stuff set up. Then the aircraft commander, after he was satisfied that the proper maintenance had been done and all the forms were up, would sign off the book, walk out and make a final walk around. We'd button up the airplane, start it up, check it out, make sure everything was working in the preflight checks then, and we'd launch out to wherever we were going for the first flight.

Most of the time there would be a "Go here, this point, this point, this point." So there'd be... If this was a re-supply, "Go to Baldy; pick up the supply; take it to that destination." They'd give you a grid coordinates, and you'd look up the grid coordinates. You'd fly it on the map, based on the map you had and where you'd put them. You'd land. You'd pick up the stuff. You'd launch out. You'd get close to where it was, and you'd make radio contact with them. You'd know what their call sign is—that was part of what you were briefed that day—you'd know what frequency they'd be up. You'd give them a call; you'd say, "This is Chatterbox Two Zero. We're inbound to your pos [position] with two passengers and 500 pounds of C-rats." They'd say, "Roger that," and then say, "We're popping smoke." We'd go, "Roger. We've got a green smoke." And they'd say, "That's it."

They'd give us a zone brief that would tell where they last took fire, if they had taken fire, which direction it came from, what was the most likely direction of enemy fire. We'd go down, because we tried to stay about 1,500 feet most of the time, if the weather allowed us to. Then we'd spiral down to minimize that amount of time that we were between 1,500 feet and the ground. Spiral down, do a flare, plop into the zone, dump the cargo off as quickly as we could because we're vulnerable sitting on the ground; we're a sitting duck. [We'd] pick up anything else that they wanted to retrograde back with us, launch out. Go back to the Baldy to pick up the next load to go to the next destination.

If we had multiple ones [deliveries] on the same one, we'd go from there to the next one, to the next one, to the next one until we needed to go back and either get fuel or get more re-supply.

At the end of the day, we'd go back home, post-flight the aircraft, see how many holes we got shot in it or not, look at what was there. The copilot

would keep a log during this whole time, every zone we went into. If the zone had not taken fire in the last twenty-four hours, it was just a safe zone. If it had taken fire in some way or another, either somebody coming into the zone got shot at going into it, or the people on the ground had engaged the enemy in the last twenty-four hours, it was considered a hot zone.

You got a point for going... If it was an unsecure zone, so you got a point. If you took fire going into the zone, you'd note that you took fire, and you got two points for that. If they actually shot a hole in the airplane, you got five points for that. That was important because that's how they added up the points for Strike/Flight Air Medals.

DePue: Strike/Flight?

Tyler: Strike/Flight Air Medals. It's the Air Medal, as opposed to a Single Mission Air Medal, where you go out and do some heroic thing that you get a Single Mission Air Medal. The Strike/Flight Air Medal is what they were called. It's the same medal, but you got those by getting twenty points worth.

Interesting, if you went into the same zone that you took fire at fifty times that day, you got your two points, and that was it. If you got shot down, or you just got one hole through the skin of the airplane, you got five points. That's all that counted.

Several years later, we're at a function when I was at AWS, that's Amphibious Warfare School, and the friend of ours that was holding and hosting this party had been an officer selection officer [OSO]. He was a classmate of mine at AWS, and he had had the whole seminar over to meet some of his brand-new second lieutenants that he had signed up when he was on OSO duty.

So, they're all sitting around, talking his stories, and, of course, the grunts are grunts and everything else. And really, aviators just don't live in the real world, unless you're a helicopter pilot. Our grunts like our helicopter pilots because we save their bacon; we give them their bacon; we have a closer contact with them. So, this young second lieutenant is standing there looking at my fruit salad and looks at my thirty-two Air Medals and says, "Thirty-two, what does that mean?" And I says, "Well, they're Strike/Flight Air Medals. That means they got to shoot at me a bunch." [I] kind of let it go at that. And he says, "Well, how do you get those?" I say, "Well, each one of those is twenty points." "Well how do you get a point?" So, I go down this litany that I just went down with you, and I didn't think about it.

My wife is standing right next to me. She's going, "Twenty times thirty-two, two points. Two times ten, that's a lot of times!" (laughs) A fair amount, fair amount, yeah.

But the copilot keeps that log and turned that in because that was important for our air crewmen to be able to get some sort of combat decoration for their services as well. So, we would keep that log. Come back in at the end of the day, do a debrief if there was any intelligence or any of that sort of stuff out there that needed to go in, and head over to the Club. Oh, and along the way, we'd probably have C-rats for lunch.

A nice thing about the 46, the engines are internal. They have six screws or whatever that open the door, Dzus fasteners, to the engine bay so you can get to it from inside. So, you can take your can of ham and mothers and—

DePue: Ham and mothers?

Tyler: Ham and mothers.<sup>25</sup> I'd leave the rest of that off. Ham and lima beans are, you know—

DePue: One of the least favorite C-Rations to eat I would assume.

Tyler: Yes. That's why they're called ham and mothers. You could take that can and put it on the engine bay door and close it back up and fly around for about less than ten minutes and pull it down and you'd have some nice... Well, I wouldn't say nice, but you'd have warm C-rats, as opposed to cold C-rats that you could eat while you were flying or while you were waiting or whatever else. But you don't want to forget that you've left that can of ham and mothers back there because if it gets too hot, it explodes, and you've got \_\_\_ all over the engine. The mechanics really don't like that. (phone rings in background) She'll get it upstairs, unless you want to put it on pause. (pause in recording) She got it.

DePue: You mentioned that when you got back, there probably would be a debriefing, and then you headed over to the Club. What else would you do in your down time?

Tyler: You had your ground duties. On your nonflying days... Like I said, I was the education officer; I would make sure that... In fact, part of what I did when I was over there is I made sure every one of the Marines in our squadron had at least completed their high school GED. We had 100 percent completion rate. I was also the voting officer, so I made sure that people voted and got their absentee ballots and all that sort of stuff in. In those days we still had pay officers, so you'd end up being a pay officer once or twice while you were there.

DePue: What were they paying them in?

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<sup>25</sup> Ham and Lima Beans was irreverently known throughout the armed forces as "Ham and Motherfuckers." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meal,\\_Combat,\\_Individual\\_ration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meal,_Combat,_Individual_ration))

Tyler: Both. Particularly if you're going somewhere, you could get American greenbacks but only a limited number of those. You could get a check, and the check could be mailed back home or whatever else. And/or you could get... Most of it was paid in military pay, MPC, military pay chits, I think they were called. They were those little certificates, or military pay certificates.

Those would change every thirty to sixty days so that they couldn't be sold or marketed on the black market. That was to keep the local economy from getting all askew because of the influx of us rich Americans.

DePue: What was used as currency in the officers club?

Tyler: MPC. Everything was MPC. The only reason you would have greenbacks is if you were getting ready to go travel somewhere. You weren't allowed to take MPC out of country. So, you would have good old Yankee dollars if you were going on R&R. [If] you were going to the Philippines for survival training, something like that, you could get some of your money in regular money.

Let's see, something else about... You were talking about what else we'd do. Recreation, we always had volleyball. Volleyball really turned into jungle ball. It was pretty good to play in-country because it was sandy soil. When we came back to Hawaii, we set up the volleyball nets in the hangar, and the CO took the volleyball nets down after about two weeks because we ended up with too many broken ankles and some broken wrists. Marines just played it "too robustly." We had racquetball courts. We'd go out and run. We'd work out. We'd do the other stuff as well.



*First Lieutenant Tyler takes a break outside his BOQ in officer country at Marble Mountain in 1970. Marine and Navy flight suits have no rank insignia other than the name badge.*

DePue: Spit and polish?<sup>26</sup> Or was that kind of downplayed.

Tyler: You certainly kept your hair trim. Didn't worry so much about spit and polish because you lived in your flight suit. If you weren't in your flight suit, you were in jungle utilities. You'd call them what? BDU's, [Battle Dress Uniforms] But we called them utilities. So, you were either in that, or you were in your flight suit. Those were the days... On base, for the most part, we could live in our flight suits, but if we went over to Mainside

<sup>26</sup> Spit polishing, spit shining or bull polishing are terms commonly used by soldiers and refer to a method for polishing leather products in such a way as to give an extremely high shine effect. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bull\\_polishing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bull_polishing))

[the main base] or Da Nang or anywhere else, flight suits weren't considered a uniform. It took us years to get over that.

DePue: Tell me about the quarters that you had.

Tyler: I lived in a Quonset hut that was divided. That's another of those typical, tin Quonset huts. It was divided into four sections, and each quadrant had two officers that lived in it. So, you had two racks. I had a stuffed chair that had a mouse nest (laughs) in it; we never did catch the mice. We both had two wall lockers. One of them was a wall locker with a light in it, to hopefully dry our stuff a little bit during monsoon season.

There was a desk, a table desk, just kind of a table that we could use for a desk with a folding chair. That was about it.

Most of the time it was kind of benign, and we didn't worry about having... We had personal weapons with us all the time, but we didn't worry

about it that much, until we started leaving the AO [Area of Observations]. The AO started receding or shrinking, and we had a couple of times when we had Viet Cong in the wire, and we were getting rocketed almost nightly.

It got to the point where my roommate and I could figure out how to sleep. I could draw my little pistola, my 38 [small, single shot handgun]—I'm not going to do much good—and grab it and roll out of my rack, underneath his rack, as he was doing the same thing, going under my rack, pointed at the door, so we could you know... We never had the occasion to do that, but we were certainly prepared in how to do that when you started hearing the thump, thump, thump, thump going down the flight line.

DePue: Were there house boys for you?

Tyler: Not house boys, but we had the maids that would come through and do our laundry and sweep for us. Missy Ba came by and did that for us.



*Officer country at the Marble Mountain Airfield, with two pilots from HMM-262, First Lieutenant Tyler's unit. Each Quonset hut housed eight officers.*

DePue: Missy Ba?

Tyler: Missy Ba. That was what we called her. I don't know whether that was her name, but that was—

DePue: Did she polish your boots?

Tyler: Yeah, I think she did; I think she did. We didn't worry about them being spit shined that much but she probably cleaned the mud off of them.



*Missy Ba, Bob Tyler's house girl who helped maintain Tyler's quarters, as well as doing his laundry. These women were under contract with the military, in order to boost the local economy.*

DePue: You mentioned lots of different kinds of missions that the unit was flying, that you were flying. What was the favorite type of mission to fly?

Tyler: You had the most contact with...in the re-supply stuff. Those you had the most contact with the troops. You were up and down, and you were busy and doing things. So, I guess that's probably kind of the favorite one to do.

The medivac missions were rewarding, although they could be boring as the dickens because you could sit there all day and do nothing, or you could have a day like Earl had where he got shot... Well, he went through three airplanes in one day, got shot up three times and ended up getting completely shot down the last time, when they had to go out to rescue...pick him up out of a rice paddy. So, you have those kinds of days. And those, in their own kind of way, are rewarding too because you're doing something. But sitting around in the bunker, waiting for something to go off is kind of boring. So, you didn't like those.

As much as we complained about night medivac, you felt good when you pulled somebody out and saved a life. There was a challenge to going out in the dark, in bad weather and working your way in to a little bitty zone that wasn't really made for you and getting in and getting out. You come back and go, "Whew, got it done." It's kind of hard to say what the favorite mission was because any day that you're flying is better than sitting on the ground. (DePue laughs).

DePue: Did you have a least favorite kind of mission to fly?

Tyler: VIP take and wait, where you just go somewhere and sit on a ramp somewhere, not knowing when you're going to leave. You'd fly somebody down to a change of command somewhere, and you sit there... You sit on the

stub wing and read a book all day long. You don't know when you're going to launch back out or anything else. Those are kind of boring because you're not getting much flight time, and you're wasting a lot of day. Those aren't fun.

It's fun taking around... I flew Bob Hope in-country.<sup>27</sup> I flew some of the USO teams, fun taking them around. Flew a bunch of the Red Cross Donut Dollies.<sup>28</sup> They go out to some place or another for a USO [United Service Organizations] show or something.



*The Marines were visited frequently by USO shows. This group in 1971 hailed from Australia and gave the Marines a reason to take some time off from flying.*

DePue: Did you get to meet Bob?

Tyler: Only as a handshake as he got in and got off the airplane. But I didn't get to speak. I got my helmet on and rrrrrrrrrrr; it's kind of noisy.

DePue: Probably he was traveling around with an entourage of more interesting looking people as well.

Tyler: Yeah. You got the small entourage of where we were going at the time, from one place to another. Yeah, hauled him.

DePue: I'd like to have you tell me about some of your more memorable missions.

Tyler: I told you about Duc Duc. My first medivac mission... And I told you about the guy that jumped out of the spider hole and that. That was certainly memorable. They kind of run together. But the first medivac mission I had, we were called out to pick up an NVA [North Vietnamese Army] medivac that had been captured by the Korean Marines, who were operating in our... were part of our—

<sup>27</sup> Leslie Townes Hope, known professionally as Bob Hope, was a British-born American stand-up comedian, vaudevillian, actor, singer, dancer, athlete and author, with a career that spanned nearly 80 years. Celebrated for his long career performing in 57 USO shows to entertain active duty American military personnel, between 1941 and 1991, Hope was declared an honorary veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces in 1997 by an act of the United States Congress. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob\\_Hope](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Hope))

<sup>28</sup> Donut Dollies were single, female college graduates who were used primarily as morale boosters for U.S. combat troops in Vietnam. Many of these young women were as motivated by JFK's [the president's] call to duty and service as the guys were. ([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donut-dollies\\_b\\_1384233](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donut-dollies_b_1384233))

We had, I guess, a battalion of Korean Marines that worked in our AO with us. So we go in to pick up this medivac, and coming out of the tall elephant grass are these guys carrying this poncho that has the medivac in it. They're dragging the poncho across. All four of the guys carrying the poncho are dressed wearing kind of flip flops that are made out of old recycled tires—just kind of the flip flop kind of shoe, shower thongy kind of shoes—a cartridge belt that has ammunition, a canteen and a couple of bags of rice on it, carrying a rifle and a flop hat. That's it. No jungle utilities, no trousers, no skivvy drawers. We're talking about starkers.

I'm going, "These guys are some of the meanest mothers in the valley" to be dressed that way, doing whatever they're doing out here in the woods, dragging these... The aircraft commander is saying to the gunner, "I don't know who these guys are. I don't have a play book. If they point anything at us, take them on." That's memorable, when you see that kind of audacity, whatever, coming out of the bush.

Talking to some colleagues of ours, when we were infantry side, [they] said that they had done a sweep, that we had had a battalion or regimental sweep through a particular area, a battalion here and a battalion there. And the Korean Marines had had another sector that they had. The Koreans got through well ahead of the other guys in the sweep. The Marines said they couldn't have swept it, thoroughly, that fast. So, they went back through and said it was really eerie because there was nothing left alive. There wasn't a monkey; there wasn't a noise. When they swept it, they swept it.

They shared a hangar on our base with us, great guys, great guys. I don't want to mess with them. I would agree with that from my later tours when I've been in Korea and working with them, when I was flying 130s.

Other memorable missions... Certainly the Duc Duc one is one I remember. Some other interesting missions... I don't remember any really hairy, hairy missions. I've gone out with an airplane and brought back a chunk of Swiss cheese and been shot up a bunch.

It's the anecdotes that I remember as much, [like] getting ready to take a force recon team in on a deep insert, where I left my ID card, my ID tags, carried only my Geneva Convention Card, and we painted out the star on the side of the airplane because we were going places where we didn't go.

We're taking this deep recon team in, and here comes this grunt out, with all of his camouflage paint on, walks up [to] the side of the airplane and presses on the airplane. Of course, that's very thin aluminum. He goes, "That's not going to stop anything." I says, "No, that's only going to add shrapnel." They get inside that and think it's safe, and they'll hide behind... They'll look out the window, and they see fire; they'll hide behind, try and shoot out and end up shooting our rotor blades most of the time because we're



turning. If they're on a target as we turn, they'll end up stitching a couple of rounds through our rotor blades. Nope, it's not going to do any good. So, here's this guy with seventy, 100 pounds of stuff on his back, and "arghh," mean as a ... "That's not going to..." "Nope. It's not."

You get the mission I told you about, the water bladder, that I go out, and we're hauling a water bladder out to a mountaintop pos. It's late; I'm light on fuel because that way I could carry it. We get out there, and I let my copilot make the first pass at it. Of course, you got this couple of thousand pounds down here, underneath the airplane. He's coming in a little fast, and he's just going to do a flare of the airplane. As he flares the airplane—

DePue: (laughs) Physics takes over.

Tyler: Physics takes over, and this thing, like a pendulum, swings in front of the airplane and starts dragging the airplane. There was no way we were going to stop and get it there. So, I say, "I got it." I nose it over, and we come around. We come around the next time, a longer more predictable approach, and we land.

The Marines come out because, like I said, it's like a big donut, and they come out, and they put a couple of logs under each side of it. You got three Marines on each side of it, just holding it. "Okay, we clear to let it go?" "Yep." So, we cut the lanyard that holds it loose and let the hook loose, and it drops the lanyard. "Okay, you're cleared to go."

So, here's this donut down here, rotor wash just beating straight on it. We go to take off, the rotor wash, of course, is going to wash one side and not the other side. What's in it is fluid. Physics once again takes over, and you get this sloshing of the water inside this water bladder, three Marines on one side hanging onto it. It sloshes over one side; it sloshes the other way; it sloshes back; it sloshes over the two on the inside. I'm out of here.

The one in the center is like this. The thing rolls right over it, rolls down the hill. I'm watching this out the window as I'm spiraling up, this is going on. I call up and says, "Do we need to come back and take anybody out for medical treatment?" "Nah, he's alright, but you may want to wait around awhile until he catches up with the two guys that left him." (laughs) You sit there and go, "Yeah, okay, I get that."

In a similar vein, I think, when you make that transition from copilot to aircraft commander, the first mission they give you is an easy one because you got to get used to being an aircraft commander and making the decisions and doing stuff. I'm sitting out there with Jack Winternheimer on my first aircraft commander ride, and Jack's ready to be an aircraft commander as well. And W plus twelve, Winternheimer—If you count the number of letters, it's W plus twelve—he's sitting over there in the other seat. Our mission that

day was to go from the command post to the *USS Sanctuary*, a hospital ship in the Da Nang Harbor, to take the band to entertain the casualties aboard the ship.

So, we're sitting there going, "Okay, band and instruments." So, they pack on. Well, that weighs a lot, and it's a hot day. The *Sanctuary* has a very, very small deck, and you have to land diagonally on it and all that sort of stuff. So you sit there and go, "Well, how many?" "Ten, twelve." They put them on and their instruments, do a hover check. "Ah, what do you think?" You kind of look at Jack, and he goes, "I don't know," and it hits you. Nobody else is going to make the decision but you. You're now responsible for this airplane, its mission, the people onboard. "Oh my, okay. Kick two off." "Yeah, I think that's okay; we'll try it."

That was a memorable moment. It's one of those transition moments that I think... Certainly pilots end up with, and crew airplanes, when all of a sudden, they're solo, or they're the aircraft commander, or you're the squadron commander or the company commander. There's nobody else to make the decision, and that level of responsibility starts to weigh in on you.

I can remember the poor landing signal enlisted guy on the *Sanctuary* who threw his wands in the thing and dove himself into the safety net, as my copilot came in too fast and thought at the time it wasn't going to get stopped, (laughs) and we did one of those rollovers over the side.

Went up to Khe Sanh one time, and as we got in, it was one of those milk run things. We were taking the division staff up to check on the troops up there, so we didn't have any gun package; we didn't have anything else. It hadn't really been that bad of a place lately. It was post- the big Khe Sanh thing. It was the second insertion back into Khe Sang, looking at moving some of the ARVN forces across the border and stabilizing that area in the drawdown. I land, let the dignitaries off, or all the staff off.

The tower comes up and says, "Would you mind repositioning to the other pad?" "Be glad to." Just as I lifted off, the NVA or the Viet Cong lobbed three mortars across where I'd been sitting in my aircraft. I went back to the tower and said, "You know, I'd be glad to move any time you want to. You didn't have to be quite so graphic. I'd have still moved." (laughs) Those kind of missions—

I think the other thing that gets to some of the things that we did that were interesting missions that I remember is, I ended up with a bunch of congressional staffers or whatever on a fact-finding look. They came around and went around and flew up around Hue, up to the rock pile and in and around some of those places, looking at some of the atrocities that the NVA and the Viet Cong did, the mass graves that were there, the evidence of the

stuff that went on in the countryside around Tet, as far as how they tried to oppress the folks in there.

When you're part of that, and you're going to those places, and you're seeing that stuff, and then you come back to Hawaii, and three years later you finally see a little clipping in the paper in Section C, page sixteen or so, about this particular trip that I was doing, it made me question—as you've asked and probed a couple of times—how did I feel about the unrest and the tenor of our country and everything else. I think our fourth estate really did us a disservice because they were so opposed to it. They only told one side of the story, and they did so repeatedly.<sup>29</sup>

I got to the point that I could not watch CBS News. My son has this thing of characterization of me watching the evening news (laughs) and just getting fired up because of the slanted nature of what was put out there, when the only thing that was reported was the stuff that would play well in wherever on the news media.

I said we did the general's chase, sitting over in the general's mess. You got to know the Wing PA [Public Affairs] Officer. He was a junior officer, so he sat down with the pilots. He would talk and everything else. He says, "You know, it's really amazing. This is what we're going to brief today: We've got fourteen county fairs going on. We've pulled out 186 civilian medivacs out of Duc Duc. We did this; we did that, all those. We built so many orphanages. We did whatever else. We've got just this sweep going on, and nobody will show up, or only one person will come to the briefing.

"You have a story, where one civilian was killed by friendly fire, and the room is going to be packed. You have an incident where somebody inadvertently dropped a napalm bomb on a village somewhere, and the room is going to be packed. The stories that they came to even hear about were only the bad stories that would make good press. They didn't come to tell the whole thing." It's taken me a while, and our press is getting sometimes I think a little bit better than it was, but I really wish they would have told the story that I saw because I did see that we made a difference. We made a difference in I-Corps. I can't speak for the rest of what was going on in Saigon; I can't speak to the rest of that, but I know in I-Corps it made a difference when we left. I don't know. I think I got off track there, but—

DePue: No, that's fine. Were you ever rocketed, either on the base or on the aircraft?

Tyler: The base got rocketed several times, particularly as we were... You know, it was kind of a benign environment for us, when I first got there. Then, as the

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<sup>29</sup> The Fourth Estate is a societal power, force or institution whose influence is not consistently or officially recognized as such. "Fourth Estate" most commonly refers to the news media, journalism or 'the press'. ... Of which the press is the fourth element. (<https://medium.com/@ubuntufm/the-fourth-estate-on-the-role-of-journalism-facts-vs-fake-news-61168f8e8cf>)

AO cut down... One night, in fact, I was on a mission eighty package. We were sitting there, and some local...some of our in-close companies, were reporting activity and movement and everything else. So they called us out of our bunker, actually out of the club. We were the guys sitting there drinking water and Coca Cola, no drinks that night, and they called the mission eighty package out.

So, we're over sitting in the ready room, waiting for the call. We had this major that was just his second or third tour there, who was there with his helmet on and his flak jacket on. And we're just sitting there kind of making fun of him, playing ace-deuce, saying, "Oh this is a boring thing." About that time, they walked about six rockets or mortars down our flight line, blew up a couple of our airplanes, did quite a bit of damage to a bunch of stuff.

We're scrambling in this tin building, with no blast walls around it and the concrete floor, looking for some crack in the concrete to crawl under because all of us had flight gear on. We didn't have battle gear on, if you will. I had a front bullet bouncer; I didn't have a back-bullet bouncer. I didn't have a hard hat; I had a flight helmet that I was carrying. In fact, it was hanging in the airplane; it wasn't even where I was.

After that, we got a whole lot more interested then. Towards the end, we were getting one or two rockets or one or two mortar rounds or whatever they were launching at us. We'd get those a couple or three times a week, almost to the point you could figure, about 11:00, 11:15, they'd walk some [mortar rounds] down because it would be dark enough they'd go in-place, launch them off, and then go back and hide into the woods.

DePue: When we first met, you mentioned, I think, Miyamoto?

Tyler: Yeah, Earl Miyamoto. That's the guy I pulled out of the rice paddy, okay? Earl was in one of the other squadrons. We had several of those guys who had enough time left on his tour that, when their squadron went back, they became replacement pilots for us, since we weren't bringing anybody new in-country. So, he joined our squadron late in our thing, and he ended up...

Just before he [Miyamoto] got moved over to our squadron, he had the medivac package one day, and he went out. Going into a zone, he got all shot up, got the medivac back, brought the airplane home, said, "I need a new one." [He] got a new airplane, went back out. Going in to the next zone, he got all shot up again, brought the airplane back, got another one, went out and, coming back that time, he got all shot up again, to the point that it shot his hydraulics out. [He] set the airplane up, as you were talking about in auto rotation, but set it up for a very controlled crash into a landing attitude and everything else, into a rice paddy. He'd done well, except just as he got down there, his left main mount hit a paddy dike, so when it went in, it went in, and it rolled over on its side. The medivac had both of his legs cut off and did not

survive the crash, probably wasn't going to survive getting back anyway. But everybody else got out.

The funny part of that story is, Earl's sitting in the right seat, and the airplane's laying on its right side. For him to get out, he had to get through the top side of the airplane. He manages. The copilot's sitting there in the seat, and Earl goes out, reaches back in, unleashes the copilot, who has frozen and hanging on to the seat like this (gestures), and his harness is loose; it's not even holding him in place. He's just frozen. Earl grabs him and pulls him out. —Earl's a little guy, a little Hawaiian guy—pulls him out, gets him out. The rest of the crew get out. They couldn't get the medivac out before the airplane caught fire and all that sort of stuff.

I get called out to go pick him up. The copilot's sitting there saying, "Nobody helped me out. I got out myself." Earl looks at him, and right in the middle of his bullet bouncer is a footprint from where Earl walked on him going out. He says, "If that's true, how did that boot print get there?" I picked Earl up, and of course, he's covered in mud and everything else. I fly the whole crew to the *Sanctuary* for checkout afterwards. Then I assumed the medivac mission. Then I got called out to go pick him up off the *Sanctuary* and bring him back home. Of course, he recognized me. He was just another guy to me, at that point in time, but he remembered me rescuing him from all that.



*The remnants a CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter, following seizure of the forward transmission and de-syncing of the rotor systems. The helicopter crashed in front of the officer's club at Marble Mountain in the spring of 1971.*

He became a really good friend. We've stayed through that and Hawaii, AWS, back through Navy Flight School for both of us to end up in fixed wing. From there our careers went different ways.

DePue: When we started today, you were mentioning that flying helicopters in Vietnam was safer than driving down the highway.

Tyler: Um-hmm.

DePue: How many casualties did your squadron take while you were there?

Tyler: While I was there, we lost... We had one person, one, **two** die, but that was a mechanical error in the local traffic pattern.

DePue: How about the medivac mission that you just talked about?

Tyler: Oh, okay. Those... Everybody got out except the medivac, okay? When I'm counting the casualties that we had, I know of... Total loss aircraft, we had four in the time I was there, that the aircraft were a total loss. Out of those, one of them was a mechanical in the local pattern. It was a case of they ran out of transmission fluid, and the transmission seized, and the aircraft crushed together and disintegrated, right in front of the O [Officers] club, on the beach.

DePue: Without loss of life?

Tyler: That one killed one person, but everybody else got out okay in that one.

DePue: But it sounds like you were hauling plenty of dead and wounded out of the combat zone.

Tyler: Yeah, yeah. We had... In fact, there's a couple... I guess that's a memorable mission I forgot to tell you about, coming out of Khe Sanh, that area, because we couldn't get in. We ended up with an airplane full of full body bags, and they'd been in the heat for a while, for several days. Not all the body bags... Some of them had holes in them, so you ended up with the fluid and everything else that then soaked into the floor and underneath the floor. It was a memorable flight.

When you get back to Graves Registration, you unload the airplane and take it back over to the squadron, and you say, "We really need to clean this." Well, they cleaned it, but that didn't get the stench out of the airplane. You had to pull up the floorboards and clean out all the dirt and the dust and the rice and everything that's in there, steam clean it. It still took a while for all of it to be...cleaning it, yeah.

DePue: And these were dead Marines?

Tyler: Dead Marines.

DePue: There's a psychological impact as well, I would think.

Tyler: Yeah, you know, you always hated when you had a medivac that went to a...an emergency medivac to a permanent routine because you're pushing the airplane to the very limits, trying to get back to the hospital, and when the corpsman says, "Hey, skipper, don't worry about it. It's a permanent routine." One, you make the radio call to the controlling agency that says, "Hey, our mission has changed; it's gone from a medivac to a permanent routine." Then you're going, instead of the hospital, you're going to Graves Registration, to the mortuary. There's a letdown in the crew when that happens. Maybe that's

the TJ in me, I don't know. But if you spend your time worrying about every body bag you carried or—

On every medivac that goes to a permanent routine, you sit there and think about, “Could I have shaved two minutes off somewhere else?” “Could I have got the airplane started up and got there faster?” “Could I have done something that would have made a difference?” In reality, in that environment, those minutes weren't going to make that much difference. But other than that, other than looking at how you could have been more efficient getting there, you didn't have time to really dwell on it. I had grunt friends that says, “How do you do this, day in and day out?” “How do you go out and do the medivac, pick up the body bags, get shot at, and come back, live in a civilized world for the night, and then get up the next morning and go back out and play with this stuff?”

I didn't think about that. Maybe that's personality; maybe that's defense mechanism. Freud would probably say I was repressing something; I don't know (laughs). But you didn't dwell on it. This was your mission, and you went out, and you did your mission to the best of your ability. You worried about taking care of your troops, **your** air crew, **your** airplane. You didn't think about your personal survival because you're flying the airplane. You didn't want to damage the airplane, for all sorts of reasons. You didn't think about... Yeah, you handled casualties, and they went back. But you didn't live with it, not necessarily. You didn't dwell on it, I guess is what I'm saying. So, I don't know what psychological damage... My wife would probably say I've always been a little weird.

DePue: I would imagine, when you're actually flying the aircraft and you're in the cockpit, you've got way too much to be concerned about, just making sure you're flying the aircraft correctly.

Tyler: Yeah, certainly, getting in and out of the zone, that's a truism. When you're looking at a couple of them that are back there, that the corpsman has got the casualty on the floor of the airplane doing CPR on him, you can see it in your mirror. You can see him working, working on him, working on him, working on him, because that's motion; that's motion in your mirror, okay. You can look around, particularly once you're up on altitude, at 1,500 feet.

Coming back, you've got ten, fifteen minutes before you're back at the...ready to land the airplane again. So, if the copilot's flying it, and all you're doing is talking on the radio, you can look around, “How's it going back there, doc?” He'll talk to you, or not, if he's too busy. Yeah, getting in and getting out of the zone, you're really busy. As a medivac bird, you've got the lead. The gunships and your wingmen, they're staying out of your way. You tell them, “Give me clearance across.” Your wingman's doing all the radio stuff, so that all you're worried about is flying the airplane.

DePue: We've been at this for close to a couple of hours here today. There's more I want to talk to you about in your Vietnam experience. A lot of it is kind of a much more generalized discussion.

Tyler: Okay.

DePue: But I think that can better wait for the next time we meet, if you don't mind, and we'll call it a day.

Tyler: That sounds like a plan.

DePue: Thank you, Bob.

Tyler: Thank you, sir.

[end of transcript #2]

## Interview with Robert Tyler

# VRV-A-L-2013-102.03

Interview #3: December 16, 2013

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, December 16, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I have my third session with Colonel Robert Tyler. Good morning, Colonel.

Tyler: Good morning, Mark.



DePue: How are you today?

Tyler: I am fine.

DePue: We both spent the weekend shoveling snow.

Tyler: That we did, and my toy is still sitting in the garage. (laughs)

DePue: Hasn't moved from the garage.

Tyler: Hasn't moved.

DePue: The last thing you need is slush and ice and especially salt.

Tyler: Yes, yes.

DePue: Speaking of machines, what I wanted to start with today is, we talked almost exclusively last time about your experiences in Vietnam. We talked a little bit about the CH-46, but I want you to talk a little bit more about its flight capabilities, kind of walk us through its abilities once you've gotten it in the air.

Tyler: By being a tandem rotor—that meaning two main rotors, one in front and one in back—it's a very stable platform. It was designed to carry a whole squad of Marines. I think it was designed [for] around twenty, twenty-three Marines.



*First Lieutenant Tyler at the controls of a CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter while flying a mission somewhere over central South Vietnam, circa 1971.*

We found out in-country we could carry about nineteen combat loaded Marines, maybe less, depending on how much stuff they were carrying. Compared to modern machines today, it is underpowered, but in that day, it was really a step up from the H-34, which was a reciprocating engine helicopter that the Marine Corps used extensively before the 46 was introduced in the late sixties in-country Vietnam.

The airplane has two turbo shaft engines, that being a turbine that then runs a power shaft out the back that goes in to a transmission, as opposed to

the jet engines you see on jet airplanes, on fast fixed-moving airplanes. The output from the engines then goes into a gear box, and that gear box then... First off, it mixed both the engine inputs so that they match together through the gearing and all that sort of stuff, and then it synced the front rotor system to the back rotor system much like an egg beater. It kind of does the thing, as you can see in the model up there, fun airplane to fly.

It responded well, hydraulic controls, fully instrument capable, so you could fly in the clouds. It was designed with anti-ice and de-icing capabilities, so technically you could fly in icy conditions if necessary. In Vietnam we actually cut the wires to the blade de-ice because if you happened to leave them on, it would melt the leading edge of the blanket that allowed the ice to melt, and that wasn't a good thing for aerodynamics and that sort of stuff.

We had aluminum blades at the time, which have since been replaced with fiberglass blades. It was interesting because the lift is created by the leading edge going through the air, advancing through the air. So you could actually take a round through the rotor blade. All it'd do is put a hole in it, and it'd go out the other side, and you could still keep flying. So, it wasn't catastrophic.

You could also chop down trees with your rotor blades because the leading edge of it... If the blade was flat when it hit the tree, little trees... You can't get... Big trees, it's going to break something, but little trees... There's one zone I remember going into that you could see where somebody had chopped down the tree to a stump, and I guess it got big enough at the stump. Going into the zone—I went in for a medivac one time—you kind of walked it down because it was kind of a zone at the bottom of a steep mountain on the side. You walked it down, and you had these little trees that were growing out of the side. You'd come part way down, and you'd turn sideways just a little bit and come back down and then come back.

You'd get down, and you got the back two wheels on the ground, but you never let the nose gear come all the way down because you were keeping the tip path plane of the front rotor system, and it was just chopping off the little shoots out of the stump. We didn't want to hit the stump with the rotor blades because it would chop, chop, chop, chop, chop, chop, just like a lawn mower or a weed whacker.

Flying it, it would go 110, 120 knots. It could actually go faster than that. When we got newer blades and some of that other stuff, we could get more speed out of it, but 120 seemed to be what we did most of the time. If we had a gun package with us, we'd stay at about 110 because that's the fastest the Huey's could keep up with us.

It was capable of getting in and out of zones very efficiently. You could do one-wheel hovers in places. You'd put one of the back wheels on a piece of firm ground, lower the ramp, and people could get on and off.

DePue: Why would you do that?

Tyler: The zone is too small for anything else. If you needed to go into the little hut, the little building on like Marble Mountain, just south of the airfield, there was not a place to land. You couldn't get all three-landing gear on.

DePue: That was level enough for you.

Tyler: Level enough or big enough. It just wasn't a large enough place. So, you'd go into a place, and you'd put one landing gear on. That would stabilize it enough that you could lower the ramp, [and] people could run up, instead of sitting there trying to hover and have them jump on a moving platform. That was preferable if you could find that. Or you'd put two wheels on the back of a rice paddy dike or something like that, so people could get in. But if the paddy dike wasn't wide enough for the two things, you could land with just one on it. That would be enough that folks could run in and out while the other one was sitting over here, above the mud and the muck and everything else. You'd just hold that one-wheel hover as people would run on. That was better than bringing them in with a jungle penetrator or a hoist. It's quicker and more efficient.

DePue: Better than landing in the rice paddy itself?

Tyler: You wouldn't want to land in a rice paddy. You don't know what's under the water. One and two, that messes up all that mucky water and stuff you get in. You could land on a rock on one wheel and something on the other side. That would tip you over. So, if you know what you're doing, [and] you can see where your wheels are, you're better off. Who wants to do a water landing anyway? That's going to put corrosion on the airplane and all that, even though the airplane is designed—because it's a naval airplane—designed to operate at sea.

Part of the design specs was that it would be able to float for two hours in sea state 2, two-foot waves. I have water taxied it as we'd go out and actually land in the water and water taxi and all that sort of stuff. It does okay in calm seas; I wouldn't want to be in high seas with it.

The other thing, the airplane was designed without combat in mind. It was designed as a military aircraft, but it was designed... The engineers thought about physics. They didn't think about combat tactics. They didn't think about how to get in and out of zones and do things. Certainly, as it was designed, it was a beautifully designed airplane, where in flight, instead of

being in the Huey where you're kind of always looking down because the tip path plane of the rotor system has to turn to get forward motion out of it—<sup>30</sup>

DePue: So, you're tilting it forward—

Tyler: Forward, so that the air going through it moves it forward. It's not level. If it's just level, you're just going to sit there and hover all day. You've got to turn it that way to get it to...kind of like those little whirly birds you stick out the window of your car. If you have it like this, it's just going to sit there and do nothing. You got to turn it into the wind for it to move forward. That's the same way with the rotor system.

But when you've got a tandem rotor system, you're either going to really be tilting down at thirty degrees, and the passengers are going to be uncomfortable and everything else... So, what Boeing Vertol did is they trimmed the rotor system by moving the tip path plane through a squash plate up there, so that the rotors tilted relative to the fuselage, so that it would be level in flight. But that meant, if you wanted to come into a hover, you have to get your rotor plane parallel to the deck.

If you get that parallel to the deck, you're now going to be way high in a nose... As far as the nose, you're going to be way high in a hover, and it's going to be uncomfortable, hard to load troops in and out, hard for the pilots to see. They then programmed so that, as your speed increased in level flight, the tip path plane increased. As you slowed down, it would come back. Then when you got to a hover, there was a position that'd go hover aft, that would move from a forward degree of angle on, particularly the aft rotor system, to eleven degrees aft, which would then bring it up so that when you came down to a hover, it would almost be a perfectly three-wheel hover.

DePue: A couple of points for clarification on my part and especially since whoever's listening to this hasn't seen your hands moving back and forth.

Tyler: Hands, yeah.

DePue: We're not talking about just the rotor blades that are tilting, we're talking about the entire rotor head that has the ability to rotate.

Tyler: Yes, the whole rotor head. As it comes up from the transmission, it sits on a big planetary kind of gear that we call a swash buckle. It rotates, and it actually moves, and it pitches the change of that.

DePue: Are you able to change just one?

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<sup>30</sup> Tip path plane is the plane of the circular path in which the tips of the helicopter rotor blades rotate. It is perpendicular to the crankshaft or the rotorshaft. ([http://aviation\\_dictionary.enacademic.com/6797/tip-path\\_plane](http://aviation_dictionary.enacademic.com/6797/tip-path_plane))

Tyler: No.

DePue: They both—

Tyler: They both sync. Now they move different parts. The aft head moves more than the forward head does, just because it makes the airplane maintain the attitude that you want more. That becomes significant when we started to get into the tactics. But as the airplane was designed, it was designed for this “Okay, I’m going to make an approach to that field out there.” You’d start out at your 100 knots, and you’d just pull the nose up, and you’d just start slowing down. You would fly a very predictable four and a half or five-degree glide path. As you went down that glide path, you would both get closer to the ground; your air speed would descend. You were looking for seventy knots and seventy feet, fifty knots and fifty feet, all the way down to touchdown. It was nice and predictable.

As several military folks have talked about, the enemy gets a vote in your tactics. As soon as we came in and started being predictable in our landings, in the nice little Phrog, they decided that they could figure out how to shoot at you. That was not very good.

So, Marines being what they are, started saying, “Well, we’ll spiral down. We’ll stay above 1,500 feet, which is out of the range of small arms fire. We’ll come over the zone, and when we identify the zone by the smoke and who they are and their radio contact or the panels or however we identify the zone, we’re going into, then we’ll do this: spiral down at thirty, forty-five degrees angle bank, minimum power on the aircraft, just spiral it down, get down to the bottom, do a flare to dissipate air speed and energy, roll it up, pull the nose up, roll the nose over, and plop down in the zone.” Works really well.

Then we discovered that this little trim switch that they had for the rotor systems would reprogram the head for us because when you got below seventy knots or so, you were supposed to reach down—or certainly by the time you got to about forty knots—and turn that to hover aft, and it would change the pitch, if you will, or the angle of the rotor.

DePue: Of both rotors.

Tyler: Of both rotors, particularly the back one because it would go from seven degrees forward to eleven degrees aft or something in that ballpark. That was supposed to be all predictable.

But what we discovered was, as you’re coming down, and you’re wrapping it down, if you reached in there while you were still about 100 knots or so, flip that to hover aft, it was like putting a fifty-two-foot speed brake out. The airplane would just “whoa,” stop, and you could just put it right in the zone very quickly. Troops get on; you lifted off; off you go.

The airplane, as I said, was designed by engineers, all the stress and everything else. But as you and I had talked about, all of the aft transmission, the ramp, the aft rotor head, both of the engines were aft of the landing gear, as far as where the weight in the airplane was. They were aft of Station 410. That's also a field splice, where the airplane is put together in three sections: the cockpit section, the cabin section and the aft section. And that—

DePue: You're suggesting that a lot of the weight is in that back section.

Tyler: I'm saying **a lot** of the aircraft weight is in that aft section, aft of station 410, which was originally held onto the airplane with two bolts, two big bolts, and that was it. So, when you did that hover aft trick, the stress on the aft rotor system kind of pulled the back of the airplane from the rest of the airplane. Not too big, you could pull the whole back end off I guess.

It didn't really pull the back end off, but what it did is it stretched the little universal joints and whatever else that you had in the sync shaft that connected the mix box to the forward transmission. When it did that, you would desync the two rotor systems. So, like an egg beater, the two aren't going together. They kind of hit, and when they hit, it came apart in three pieces, let's just put it that way. It was a real mess. The airplane early on had a bad reputation for being a crowd killer. It was an airplane that would fly a section on itself until it got tired and then would disintegrate (laughs).

When they came out with the modified airplane, what they did is they said, "Okay, we're going to fix it so the pilots can't do that. It will not program to hover aft until we're below seventy knots. When people are shooting at you, you find ways to work around that. You found out that the guy in the right seat could reach his hand out the window, disrupt the airflow over the pitot tube—which is the air speed indicator sensor—and the airplane would think it's below seventy knots. Hover aft, stick your hand out there, and you could still reprogram them (laughs).

DePue: Is that the copilot position?

Tyler: Normally the pilot flies from the right seat. However, copilots love stick time [holding the stick; flying the plane], and they love it when they can get in the aircraft commander's seat. Most of the aircraft commanders actually flew in the left seat often times to be nice guys for their copilots.

DePue: Did this require two people to actively be doing things?

Tyler: Oh yes, yeah. Anytime you came into a zone, the copilot was doing like... The pilot [who is] not flying would have certain responsibilities: to run the check list, to work the radios, and set the speed trim and everything else.

An interesting story: I was flying with a young copilot, not that I wasn't young at the time too, but I was an aircraft commander. He was a guy

that just had difficulty getting in the mindset of what we were doing over there. He loved to listen to the Armed Forces Radio Station that you could pick up on the ADF [Alliance Defending Freedom] radio. It's a navigation radio, but it will also tune to any standard, with the early radios we had before FM. It's just a standard radio.

So, we were listening to Armed Forces Radio in the airplane all the time. It would be on in the background, just in your headset, which is no big deal because you could still hear the radios that you were talking to and everything else. You could turn it off if the bebop was getting too much.

But he'd be sitting there with his feet, if he wasn't flying... The cyclic had a little canvas boot around it, a he'd have his feet on that canvas boot, drumming to the music.<sup>31</sup> Of course, every time it hit that canvas, it would pull the cyclic. So, you're going along, and the airplane is kind of lurching through the sky. I slapped him up along the side of the helmet and says, "Move your frapping feet, will you?" (both laugh)

We're coming into the zone. It was a hot zone; it was anticipated being a hot zone. I'm coming in to pick up a medivac. As we're coming in... I'm flying, and I happen to be on the right side. I'm in the spiral, and he's doing the pre-landing checklist, which was to make sure there was no master caution lights; make sure everything was clear with all that sort of stuff, the parking brake was set or off, depending on where you were—in this particular case, set, because we were going someplace we didn't want to roll when we hit the ground—then when I called for it, speed trim, which would reprogram the rotors.

The speed trim sits right next to an identical switch that turned the stability augmentation because the aft rotor system was always seeking fresh air, so it would want to swap ends constantly, if there wasn't something that tried to keep it behind where it is, hydraulically and electrically. Two clicks of that would turn it off. It had two systems, a left system and a right system and off. There was two clicks on, from auto to hover aft, on the other switch that sat right beside it.

So, we're coming down. I'm about half way through the approach into the zone, and he's doing his pre-landing check. This is the guy that's going bebop all the time anyway. He reaches up, and he tests—which is not part of the checklist—the fire warning lights. So, he goes click, click, click, click, click, all the way through the fire warning, and then click, click, click back, which means I've got fire warning lights now—big lights, big red lights—

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<sup>31</sup> The cyclic is used to control the main rotor in order to change the helicopter's direction of movement. In a hover, the cyclic controls the movement of the helicopter forward, back, and laterally. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helicopter\\_flight\\_controls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helicopter_flight_controls))

flashing. [He] hits the master caution, so that the whole Christmas tree master caution lights up.

I've got all these warning lights going off, and [he] reaches down when I called... At the same time, I said, "Hover aft." He reaches down and goes click, click, and turns off my stab aug [stability augmentation]. Instantly the back end of the airplane goes skidding out from under me. These lights are flashing. I look over and I go, "What is going—expletive deleted, deleted, deleted, deleted—going on?" I reach down, and I get the speed trim back in. I get the stab aug on; I get into the zone. We get the medivac on. I get [the airplane] up. We spiral out, get out of the zone. I reach over; I unplug his helmet (laughs) and says, "Sit there; safety wire your thumbs to the seat; don't touch anything; don't say anything." We went back home. I thought, "Whew, help like that I don't need." Yes, it's a two-piloted airplane, and it works well when they both work together. That's probably more than you wanted to know.

DePue: Were you always flying with the same copilot?

Tyler: No. As we talked last time, as a schedule writer, you would rotate the pilots and the mission. You would get assigned whatever aircraft was capable for the missions. In other words, if you're doing external work, you'd have one with a hook. If you were doing a mission that you knew you weren't going to do any external work at all, you wouldn't even have a hook in the airplane. The same way with... Most of them, we always had a hoist that would work because you never knew when you were going to have to pull somebody up through a jungle penetrator hook kind of thing. They would only be rigged for SPI [Special Personnel Insertion] rigs if we were doing recon and anticipating that.

By the same token, we would mix and match crews. You would go in, and you would be assigned on the schedule. Depending on what the mission was, on some missions you would look to have... If you had a junior aircraft commander, you'd probably put a more senior copilot with him. If you had a more senior aircraft commander, then you'd put a more junior copilot with him. You'd mix them up based on, to some extent, personalities because you knew the pilots. The schedule writer was one of the squadron pilots. You'd know the pilots; you'd know who had flown what missions, and you knew you didn't put Ed with Earl because they were like vinegar and oil, and you didn't need that in the airplane. You mixed and matched as you'd go.

DePue: How about the rest of the air crew?

Tyler: The rest of the air crew... The crew chief stayed with his airplane. He was the mechanic on the airplane and so... As you see in *Top Gun*, you'll see the



pilot's name on the window.<sup>32</sup> With the exception of the CO's bird, which had his name on it, all the rest of them, the only name you'd see back by the crew entrance door was who the crew chief was. That was his airplane, and he took care of it.

What you didn't want to do was... If he [the crew chief] had been on night medivac, and the airplane came back and was recycled for an afternoon flight when he wasn't flying, you didn't want to be the crew chief that landed the airplane and poked a hole in his stub wing or did something to it, because he'd be mad at you for messing up his airplane (laughs). They took great pride in keeping their airplanes clean and keeping them working well. You knew which crew chiefs were better than others; you trusted all of them. The door gunners were assigned daily, whoever just showed up for it.

DePue: I guess I'm surprised that the Marines didn't want to keep that team cohesion, that the same air crew would be going up at the same time, just because of the importance of team work once you got in the air.

Tyler: Performance in the airplane was standardized enough, and in fact, I don't know, even... When I look at bomber crews now, flying in the air force, my understanding is they're not... I think in World War II they kept their crews together.

DePue: They did.

Tyler: But when I talk to my friends in the Air Force now, the standardization programs are so much... They don't even call each other by their name, on a cockpit in the air force. It's pilot, copilot, Navigator so that there's no rank; there's no name; there's no anything else. The standardization of what activities take place from the position of the aircraft commander or the pilot-flying, pilot-not-flying, et cetera, are such that I wouldn't say we're interchangeable, but on daily missions and things like that, they're pretty interchangeable. Certainly, when I got into the 130 business, you liked to be on the road with the same crew for several days because you got used to the rhythm of that crew. But for the most part, on a day-in, day-out basis, our standardization took care of being able to be the Apollo 13,<sup>33</sup> "I know what these people are thinking before they act." That kind of stuff.

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<sup>32</sup> *Top Gun* is a 1986 American action film about young naval aviators, given the chance to train at the US Navy's Fighter Weapons School. The film received generally mixed reviews, but was particularly praised for its action sequences, the effects and its aerial stunts. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top\\_Gun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top_Gun))

<sup>33</sup> Apollo 13 was the seventh crewed mission in the Apollo space program and the third intended to land on the moon. The craft was launched on April 11, 1970, from Kennedy Space Center, but the lunar landing was aborted after an oxygen tank in the service module exploded two days into the mission. Considerable ingenuity under extreme pressure was required from the crew, flight controllers, and support personnel for the safe return. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo\\_13](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo_13))

DePue: What I'd like to do next is get you out of the cockpit, so to speak, and ask you a series of questions that deal with the tactics and the strategy of the Vietnam War. You were there, I think, when the strategy was changing somewhat; it was transitioning. Were you there when [William Joseph ]Westmoreland [commander of United States forces during the Vietnam War from 1964 to 1968] was still there, or was it strictly Creighton Abrams being the commander in Vietnam?

Tyler: I believe it was Westmoreland's day. Up in I-Corps, as a young Lieutenant, that was so far above my pay grade that... As I commented the day after I gave up my squadron, twenty some years after the timeframe you're looking at, an aviator spends his entire career worrying about tomorrow's flight schedule. "Am I on the flight schedule as a lieutenant?" "As a captain department head, can I support tomorrow's flight schedule, and am I on it?" "As the squadron commander or the OPSO or one of those kind of guys, is my unit able to execute the mission that has been assigned to me in tomorrow's flight schedule?" "Do I have the right mix of people on tomorrow's flight schedule, and am I on it and leading the flight?" (laughs)

When one gives up command of their squadron, for the first time in their career in naval aviation, in Marine Corps aviation, your focus changes from tomorrow's flight schedule to the overall strategy of how are we employing forces? How are we doing things? That really hit me, back in the late eighties when I ended up on the G-3 staff, after turning over command of the squadron.

DePue: G-3 being operations?

Tyler: Operations at the wing level. Your question... In Vietnam all I worried about was, What flight am I flying tomorrow? Am I getting enough flight time? Who's my copilot? Where are we going?

DePue: You didn't think about the wisdom of winning hearts and minds or tallying up a big body count or questions like that?

Tyler: No, no. It was the day-to-day, how do you fly? How do you fly safely? How do you do your mission? As we mentioned in our last session, I can see in what we were doing, I was thinking about this: As a helicopter pilot in naval aviation, or Marine Corps aviation, in I-Corps, I got to fly all around I-Corps.

The tactics that my Army brethren did, when they came out of the same flight school class I did, they were kind of assigned to the same battalion, to the same area. They were just an airborne jeep. That's the way the Army tended to use their Hueys over there. That may be an oversimplification, but that seemed to us the way they did that. You kind of got to fly the same mission. You kind of flew it with the same people all the time. If you were a hunter-killer team, you'd be out there in the same AO,

putzing around with your Loach,<sup>34</sup> and you can mark the target with a burning Loach.

Flying out of Marble Mountain with Marine aviation, we flew for different units, wherever they were in I-Corps, in support of the Marines on the ground in general. As we talked about, I flew different missions every day. I flew re-supply; I would fly medivacs; I would fly whatever else. And in flying around, you could see what we were doing in the villes, because we were supporting that. We were supporting either the troops that were out there and around.

The Marine Corps took a little bit of an attitude, and we did our own thing too in I-Corps. The supreme allied commander, or whatever we want to call him, whatever Westmoreland was and all that sort of stuff over there, the Marines... Pacify I-Corps was kind of the general mission. How we did it was our business. A little bit like Fallujah and whatever else in the Gulf War stuff, the Marines have for years taken on that "We're your best friend, or we can be your worst enemy" kind of thing.

We've had a closeness most of the time in most of the places we've been. I can't say that about the Pacific Campaigns but certainly in the small wars, the Banana Wars and the other things we've done.<sup>35</sup> If you look at us, back in the early 1900s we wrote the tactical book that now the Army and the Marine Corps dusted off again for all the sandbox stuff on guerilla warfare and irregular warfare kind of stuff. Winning the hearts and minds was part of what our troops on the ground were about.

As a helicopter pilot, I could see the activities these guys were doing, but I wasn't engaged in the planning of it. I didn't have a vote. I just took the chaplain and the docs and whoever else out to build the orphanage. I took the medical teams out to care for the people out in the ville. I did that my whole tour. So, I didn't see a change in strategy, I guess is what I'm saying.

DePue: If you're winning the hearts and minds of the local population, though, the source of potential VC starts to dry up.

Tyler: You'd like to think so. They'd go away in the day time and come back at night. It was interesting watching it. Of course, as soon as our security forces, that we had out there, started drawing down—as we talked about last time—

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<sup>34</sup> The Hughes OH-6 Cayuse (nicknamed "Loach," after the requirement acronym LOH, Light Observation Helicopter) is a single-engine light helicopter with a four-bladed main rotor used for personnel transport, escort and attack missions, and observation. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hughes\\_OH-6\\_Cayuse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hughes_OH-6_Cayuse))

<sup>35</sup> The Banana Wars were occupations, police actions, and interventions on the part of the United States in Central America and the Caribbean between the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the inception of the Good Neighbor Policy in 1934. These military interventions were most often carried out by the United States Marine Corps, which developed a manual, *The Strategy and Tactics of Small Wars* (1921), based on its experiences. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banana\\_Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banana_Wars))

you could see the activities in towns like Duc Duc getting blown up and other places, when those security forces that the Marines provided by our patrols and interdictions and all that sort of stuff of the Viet Cong and the NVA that were out running around the area... When our security patrols became fewer and fewer and fewer, you could see the change in what was going on. That was a bit disappointing.

DePue: You were also there during the time of Vietnamization with the forces gradually being stepped down—you've talked about that already—but wouldn't it be much better to have the South Vietnamese Army being the ones who were in there winning hearts and minds, because the population then knows that they're going to stick around.

Tyler: Yeah.

DePue: And they know you're not.

Tyler: I would think it would be. I can tell you, during that Vietnamese part of the time... The example or the story I told you up in Khe Sanh was taking a combination of ground division staff officers and their Vietnamese counterparts to see the deployment of Vietnamese forces around Khe Sanh, when we went up and we moved so timely, as the guys did (laughs). That was the intent, and that's what we were trying to do.

When you look at that, we were turning it over to the Vietnamese, and we had promised them support, support in areas that they didn't have, as far as their own indigenous capability to do or provide that's not integral to the forces, some of the air support, some of the other stuff that we were going to provide. They were working hard at doing a good thing to maintain that security up there, as we were coming back. You could still see the activities though that they weren't able to manage at that point in time.

DePue: If I'm hearing you correctly, you basically are saying that the hearts and minds strategy, if you will, was the right strategy to be pursuing.

Tyler: In my view, yes.

DePue: Is that still your view? Did we fight the war wisely from the perspective of 2013?

Tyler: (sighs) I think winning the hearts and minds is the right thing to do from the beginning. Once we got into it and what we were doing and trying to accomplish over there in stopping the movement of communism, in the middle of the Cold War, which we all like to forget about now, when we look back on it somewhat fifty years later now, forty, fifty years later.

But through the paradigm of the Cold War and communist hegemony, we really believed, and we needed to draw the line somewhere and hold that

line. Holding that line was to in... To some extent, you had to do it somewhere. It is about the hearts and minds. I'll answer that question in two parts, I guess. We ended up getting wrapped into some of the best and the brightest who came in, who were looking for measures of effectiveness and looking—

DePue: Are you talking about at the national administrative level?

Tyler: At the national level and at the Pentagon level. The five-sided wind tunnel was worried about, "How do I justify this?" "I justify this war through some sort of metrics?" Those metrics became for us dropping bombs. Tons of bombs don't necessarily equate to anything. Sorties don't equate to anything. But those were numbers we could gather. How many missions were flown? How many bombs were dropped? How many of this were done?

The one thing that tended to be countable in some way or another was body count. If you had an engagement, and you killed ten more than you got killed, you were winning. But we learned, I think, back about in the days of Genghis Kahn, that wars of attrition really don't work too well for industrialized nations. We don't throw that number of troops out to be... And as Clausewitz will point out, you've got to... Part of it's the national will; how much are they willing to support this?

The NVA and China, who was supporting them and all that sort of stuff, were willing to throw lots of equipment and people and bodies into this whole Southeast Asia program for their purposes. It tied us up; it kept us out of other places; it kept us from doing other things. So, the metrics that we were looking at were the wrong metrics. We didn't take the metrics of how many civilians did we treat? How many orphanages did we build? How many roads did we build? How much infrastructure? We got wrapped around the axle in reporting to the administration and to Congress and everything else, how many dead.

That changed the focus so much on what was going on over there that the purpose and what we were doing wasn't clearly articulated, in terms of human security for the locals, in terms of quality of life for the locals, in terms of just even stopping the flow of communism, although we said it was stopping the flow of communism. But it very rapidly became, how many of these guys do we blow up today?

DePue: Did it make sense, given all that you just said, that the United States didn't take the war in a really vigorous way, up to North Vietnam, other than bombing?

Tyler: It never made sense to me that there was this arbitrary line in the sand that we couldn't cross to go do things. It didn't make sense to me that you could see mass troops somewhere, and you couldn't take them on. Those were beyond

my pay grade, once again, and you looked at it. Even the bombing that we did up north was very controlled and directed, and the rumor on the street at Marble Mountain was that many of those missions were really being approved at the highest levels back in Washington, as opposed to being approved by tactical commanders in the field, on what was needed there.

DePue: Did you think at the time that you guys were winning the war?

Tyler: I thought in I-Corps, we were doing... Yeah, we were doing good, up in I-Corps. Here again, I can't talk about the other what, five areas of Vietnam. But in I-Corps, we thought we were doing a good job.

DePue: Now again, in 2013 would you say that the Vietnam War was a winnable war?

Tyler: Yes. Tet sixty-eight was, we won... If you look at that, we won on the battlefield. It was costly, and we met force on force, and we won on the battlefield.

Where we lost on that was the will of the American people to continue to support it. The Vietnamese, the **North** Vietnamese, lulled us into or pulled us in to a force-on-force confrontation and got us out of a very much winning the hearts and minds and insurgency strategy—a counter-insurgency strategy would be a better way of saying that—and moved us into force-on-force.

In that force-on-force, we really then started looking for metrics. We looked to put large forces in the field and all that sort of stuff, as opposed to those forces that provided security that provided whatever and helped with the quality of life.

DePue: What should we have done differently to actually win the war?

Tyler: We should have spent more time doing the things of providing local area security, taking on and doing the local area security, putting troops on those patrol things out there, being with the people, helping the general population and the Vietnamese themselves, Vietnamatize earlier than probably we did, and take the war out of a war of attrition and take it into a counter-insurgency focus in how we supported and provided for both the local troops and the local populous.

DePue: Most of what you just said would require a larger, a longer-term presence for the United States military.

Tyler: Yes. We're still in Korea.

DePue: And would you take the war to North Vietnam, troops on the ground?

Tyler: (sighs) Once again, well above my pay grade, particularly at that timeframe. Taking it, troops on the ground, in North Vietnam would have been politically

risky on the international scale. Because we were kind of stuck in the south, I probably would not have advocated that. I don't know that I would advocate that now. I think there'd be some rather great risk with that.

DePue: Let's take you back to 1970, seventy-one when you were actually in Vietnam. How much did you know about what was going on back in the United States, the protests and the public mood?

Tyler: You got whatever was televised on Armed Forces Radio and Television Network, and you got the *Stars and Stripes*. You got some intel briefings, but very little about what was going on back there. So, everything that we got... You got some information and certainly, by being in garrison, I got more than the guys, the grunts on the ground. You knew there were protests going on. You knew there was fighting in Congress about it.

We had the frustration because we thought and we could see good things that were happening. You kind of wanted to say, Would you guys get your head out of your (pause) and really look at what's going on? Look at what it's worth, and quit fighting over the stuff that doesn't matter. Get concerned about, once again, winning the hearts and minds and fighting this with the purpose of making it better for the folks there, rather than just winning whatever argument that you could win within the beltway.

DePue: Much of the argument, especially among the youth movement in campuses and places like that, is that this was an unjust war. Did you believe it was a just war to fight?

Tyler: When you're fighting for somebody's freedom, it's always just, okay? We were fighting for the freedom of the South Vietnamese; we really were.

DePue: Did they see it that way?

Tyler: Well, move ahead to, I think, April of 1975. I'm sitting in AWS [Amphibious Warfare School] at Quantico, and while there, we had probably—I can look at my AWS book—a large contingent of South Vietnamese Army or South Vietnamese Marines, whatever, but South Vietnamese officers in the school. And we walked in—I think it was on Monday morning—and Vietnam had just fallen; Saigon had just fallen. These guys no longer had a home. It was sad; they no longer had a country.

DePue: How hard was it for you to watch these images of the helicopters taking off from the top of the embassy building and pushing helicopters off of aircraft carriers because there was no more room?

Tyler: I knew a couple of guys that flew a couple of those missions, and we've talked. I've got a friend that was in the last—flying on a VMO—that flew the last helicopter that left from the embassy and out.

I didn't know a lot of Vietnamese in-country. I didn't work with them. I knew the Vietnamese officers in AWS, but not in-country. So, I didn't have the closeness with them that some of the others had to say, "Oh, that's so and so that I know, that just fell off the building or couldn't get out." I did feel that our government significantly let down the South Vietnamese because we promised them—as I mentioned just a couple of minutes ago—all the support that would be there. If the NVA came across the line, we'd come back in and help you. When we left in seventy-one, we said, "Hey, we'll be back," kind of a [General Douglas] MacArthur thing.<sup>36</sup> "We'll be here to protect you and take care of your back."

When the defecation hit the rotary oscillator, we pulled our people out and said, "See you, bye." I don't think that was a good day for America on the international stage.

DePue: Of course, in the backdrop of that, in the 1975 decision, you've got just a year or two, about a year beyond Watergate.<sup>37</sup> So, you had this major political crisis in the United States as well. I don't necessarily want to get in to that, but I did want to ask you about your personal feelings about the protestors.

Tyler: (sighs) I said at my retirement that it had been my honor to serve our nation. I kind of think that some of our countries, some of our smaller countries, have it right when they have universal conscription because I think there is something when our citizenry does something beyond just something for themselves, when they serve their nation in some capacity. I'm not saying necessarily everybody has to wear a uniform, but I think, when you own a piece of your government, you take a little bit better care of it. The guys that are conscientious objectors and are really conscientious objectors because they have a moral problem with warfare in general, they have a moral issue with that. Okay, I can dig that.

But the guys that just... I think some of the protestors were protesting because it's fun, protesting because it's a cause, and they get wrapped up in the moment of it. Others, that burned their draft cards and ran away as draft dodgers and everything else, I thought they were being self-serving. Teenagers are very egocentric. So looking at the world through the eyes of a teenager, they could be very egocentric and get away with that. I think they needed to grow up. Like I said, I thought it was my honor and duty to serve. I

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<sup>36</sup> On 11 March 1942, during World War II, General MacArthur and members of his family and staff left the Philippine island of Corregidor and his forces, which were surrounded by the Japanese. Ultimately arriving in Melbourne, Australia, he made his famous speech in which he declared, "I came through and I shall return." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas\\_MacArthur%27s\\_escape\\_from\\_the\\_Philippines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_MacArthur%27s_escape_from_the_Philippines))

<sup>37</sup> The Watergate scandal was a major American political scandal that lasted from 1972 to 1974, following a burglary by five men of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watergate\\_scandal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watergate_scandal))



was privileged along the way to be able to be an officer in the Marines. That, I took as kind of a special thing.

DePue: One of the incidents that seems to really be seared in a lot of veterans' minds—it's something that keeps coming up in the news—is Jane Fonda's visit to North Vietnam.<sup>38</sup>

Tyler: (laughs) Ah, Hanoi Jane, yes. Didn't know her personally, didn't see a whole lot. You got all the press and all the late-night [television] kind of stuff about her. I could not do a Jane Fonda movie for a lot of years. As an American citizen, she has her right to her opinions. I thought she came awfully close to aiding and abetting the enemy in a time of war. I thought she should have thought better of that as a celebrity. But here again, I don't like flag burners either, but I'll defend their right to burn our flag in protest.

DePue: I'm going to get back to ground level with the next few questions for you. Were you ever injured?

Tyler: No. I'm very lucky. My skin is still intact.

DePue: I know you got a bucket load of air medals. What other medals did you receive while in-country?

Tyler: Just the "I've been there." I looked at it as going out and doing my job, bringing myself back and my crew back without injury. I thought that was a good thing, and a lot of that's luck. It's going into a zone sometime. You're going into a zone, and you're listening to your crew chief, who's hanging out the crew entrance door, clearing underneath the airplane so you don't poke any sticks into the stub wings or into your wheels or land on a mine or anything like that or land on a rock and tilt you over or any of that sort of stuff. He's leaning out the crew entrance door, going along, going, "Left, left, easy, three feet, five feet, three feet, a little bit to the right, steady, steady. [makes smacking sound] Okay, two feet. Okay, we're on the deck." And you say, "Okay." And he says, "Okay."

About that time, you look down, and you see this little piece of lead rolling around, up by the center console in the cockpit. You reach down and pick it up, and it's hot. You put it back down. You come out of the zone after... It was a medivac. We picked up the medivac. You come out, and you go, "Hey, I think this is yours, sarge."

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<sup>38</sup> Jane Fonda, a star of stage and screen and daughter of legendary actor and WWII Naval Officer Henry Fonda, has long been regarded as an enemy by Vietnam veterans. During the war, her actions during a trip to Hanoi earned her the nickname "Hanoi Jane" and the undying spite of Vietnam veterans. (<https://www.military.com/undertheradar/2015/08/the-real-story-of-jane-fonda-and-the-vietnam-vets-who-hate-her>)

He comes up, and he says, "Yeah, okay." It was the business end of an AK-47 round, that had gone through. And the smack you heard was it hitting the stringer about four inches from this guy's helmet. Of course, we heard it over the hot mic as it comes through. It ricocheted through the side of the airplane and down and up into the center console, between the two pilots. He picked it up and carried it around.

I saw him a couple of years later, and he had drilled a hole in that little round and carried it on his dog tags. That was his lucky day. I says, "Well, you didn't shout or get excited or anything." He says, "Hey, what can you do? It either got me, or it didn't." Sometimes there's a little bit of luck comes into play with that sort of stuff, and you get the close calls and whatever else. I took great pride in the fact that we got in and out of hot zones; we managed to do the missions and get around, and I brought everybody back.

DePue: The next question: This was an integrated force. What was the nature of the race relations you saw in your unit?

Tyler: What I saw, okay, at Marble Mountain and what I saw within HMM-262 and Marine aviation in general, at that time, was an understanding... We had a black sergeant major. We had a black major who was flying with us, and we had integrated whatever. Marines have an expression: "We all bleed marine green." I didn't see any... At that time, I saw nothing of racial issues in our units, where I was flying.

I did in Okinawa, ten years later, when I was in Okinawa, in the late seventies, okay, and the race riots and that sort of stuff that had gone on in Okinawa with some of the guys. The Marine Corps instituted their human relations program and all that sort of stuff to help deal with diversity, diversity across the board, in figuring out what's more important as far as human dignity and how we relate to people.

DePue: Why was it different in Vietnam than in Okinawa many years later?

Tyler: You had a purpose once again. You learned to trust the guy next to you. It's almost like that Middle Eastern [saying], "You're my enemy..."

I can take it even back. Our son, who was stationed in Germany, back in the nineties, ended up renting a house out on the civilian market, as opposed to living on base. The guy that owned the house and the farm that he was at was an old German. One day, in broken English, and our son, [in] even more broken German, had a conversation with this farmer. He says, "You, me, alike. We're soldiers. We fight against the Russians." So he [the German] was part of the Third Reich, and he's [Tyler's son] part of the U.S. Army, but we fight against the Russians.

I think in Vietnam, particularly in units that had missions that the folks knew what the missions were and what they were doing and had purpose to

what was going on and weren't just slogging through the jungle, being bored most of the time, until they got in a fire fight and that sort of stuff. I think they saw the common purpose, and they were fighting something bigger than their individual differences, and that helps. Adversity bonds and brings them together. In Okinawa, when you're just twiddling your thumbs and everything else, you can reestablish your neighborhood and fall into the habits of civilian life and bring it with you.

DePue: My next question is on a subject that's gotten quite a bit of discussion as well. You went in as an individual replacement?

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: What's your attitude, your view, especially in retrospect, about the wisdom of sending in individual replacements instead of swapping out units, which is what we tend to do today?

Tyler: We thought at the time, even as we were individual replacements going in, that...because that was the only place we did that. Our Med cruises that we were supporting—Med cruise being the Mediterranean—we always had a float out of Cherry Point in Camp Lejeune that was a Marine air-ground task force that floats in the Med. We have another float that floats in the Pacific—even during Vietnam—that's out there that's doing rapid reaction stuff, wherever it is. Those are always units. They get a workup, and they go in as a unit.

The Marine Corps resisted, to some extent... They didn't like doing individual replacements. They wanted to take whole units in. They wanted to work them up and take units in and bring them back out. But then again, the metrics in how we were managing that war, it was seen... People were expendable, I guess it was, and they're interchangeable to some extent. So it was not... We didn't look at combat effectiveness; we looked at management effectiveness, management of the force. We didn't lead the force; we didn't look at those intangibles. We looked at the things we could draw metrics to and tried to make it look like Ford or GM or somewhere else.

DePue: One of the criticisms is that it tended to focus on management of officer careers in particular. Did you get a feel for that, a sense of that, that you needed to do such and such to punch your ticket?

Tyler: The Marine Corps... There was that talk and Marine leadership, to the most part, really tried to squelch [that], even as early on as The Basic School and certainly by AWS.

The monitors talked about having a balanced career and having experience and everything else, the monitors being our career managers at headquarters. But punching a ticket and overt career management and worrying about, "I've got to get this next job. I got to get the next job" was

frowned upon; it really was. Our senior leadership at most levels tried to make sure... In the squadron levels, CO's really tried to move people around for experience, not for ticket punch, so that you understood how the maintenance department worked, up close and personal, or you understood how the logistics worked and embarkation and that sort of stuff. So, you would see junior officers being moved around to balance their understanding of how a squadron worked, but not so, "Oh, I've got to be in S-1 and get this tick, this checked off."

DePue: A different subject altogether: Where is Carol during the war?

Tyler: Carol is back at Eastern Illinois University, working on finishing up her bachelor's in education.

DePue: And you had a young son by that time?

Tyler: We had a young son by that time.

DePue: How did you manage to keep in touch with Carol, or did you?

Tyler: I did. We wrote every day, a letter back and forth. Of course, it takes seven to ten days to get back and forth. At the end of every day, I'd sit down and write a letter, and she'd write a letter, regardless how tired she was. It may not have been much of a letter, but it would be, "Here's what I did today." I was pretty truthful, most of the time, about my activities in the day. "Went out and got into a shit sandwich somewhere and brought back a piece of Swiss cheese when we came back" is about how I'd say it. I wouldn't say we took fifty-two holes or whatever. "Managed to fly medivac last night," just not in all the details of everything but just enough, because I didn't want... If something happened, I didn't want her to think, "Oh," because all of the relatives [would be saying], "Well, Bob's not in any place where... He's somewhere safe, right?"

"Oh yeah, um-hmm. People are shooting at him that don't know him. But yeah, he's perfectly safe" kind of thing. They say that out of concern. We were truthful in what was going on in our lives, sharing that sort of stuff. We'd tried that stupid—and you may have done it as well—those ham radio calls. What do they call those?

DePue: MARS [Military Auxiliary Radio System]?

Tyler: MARS calls, where you'd go in, and you'd get your time to make your phone call. It would go back, and it would be, "Good morning. How are you? I am fine. Over." Then they would try and say something. You placed the MARS call back to somebody who had a ham radio, who forwarded to somebody, who'd pick up the phone on the other end and call the other person. You had this network. Forty-nine million people who are worried about the NSA's

listening into our phone calls now. Let me tell you, half the world was listening to what we were saying back then.

We made maybe three the whole time I was over there, of those MARS calls, one of them early on to try it, didn't like I; one of them after we had the crash there on the beach at Marble Mountain that killed the crew—one survived but two didn't, and it tore the airplane up—because I thought that might make it to the news—when something like that happened, I'd call and say, "Everything's okay" —and then once again at the end, when we were coming out-of-country, trying to help her get set up for selling my Second Lieutenant Mach I (ooh!) and moving herself to Hawaii (laughs). That's about the only time we used that. Of course, you didn't have the Internet. You didn't have the capability of skyping or any of the stuff that our son had, the last several tours in Afghanistan and Iraq.

DePue: What happened to all the letters?

Tyler: I threw them out in-country. When I got done reading them, I'd make sure they got destroyed.

DePue: Because?

Tyler: Because they were... Hormones running around, the young twenty something letters, to some extent. They weren't journalistic in nature. They were just kind of whatever. I kind of knew you were going to ask that question, and so I asked Carol, "Did you save any?" And she says, "Nope, they're all gone." She says, "In fact, it became a little bit of a sore point" because I would write at least a letter a week to my mother, and I'd write a letter a week to her mother—just to keep their mail boxes open or whatever—and write a letter every day to Carol. Mom would get a letter, and she would go from Paris [IL] to Charleston [IL] with that letter in hand, wanting to share her letter—as if I wasn't writing my wife—with Carol.

Carol said, "I always got the feeling that she wanted me to share your letters with her" (both laugh). She has the anecdote that one day I had sent slides from one of those USO shows that came to town. It happened to be in Australia, a USO show with somebody who filled out a bikini very, very poorly and some other young dancers or whatever at a USO thing. I had taken slides of this squadron gathering at this USO show and sent them home, and just said, "Hey, you'll find this party an interesting party." That's all it said on it. So, the day the slides arrived, Carol had just pulled out the slide projector. She says, "As a good teacher, you always preview your audio-visual before the students arrive." She hadn't had that opportunity. So, in walks my mother, the church secretary from her home town, and Carol's mom and dad show up. They're going through these slides with, "Oh my goodness, that woman doesn't have very many clothes on" (laughs).

So no, Carol has none of my letters. She didn't want Mom reading them, I guess, as much as anything else. (both laugh)

DePue: I didn't expect that answer (both laughs). You mentioned USO shows.

Tyler: Yeah, you would have these roving troops. A recent movie *The Sapphires* is out. I don't know whether you saw it.

DePue: No.

Tyler: *The Sapphires* was a movie that came out in the past year that talked about, in this particular case, an Australian group that got together that would go on tour in Vietnam. The plot, probably battalion sized command post or whatever, and put on little shows for just some relaxation. Certainly New Year's Eve, the O club had a show and a presentation that came on, music.

It was fascinating to me, the Philippino bands might not be able to speak a word of English, but they would sound just like Michael Jackson or Conway Twitty or whoever they were singing.<sup>39, 40</sup> You would swear... They were so good at being able to make the music and make it sound real. You'd see these guys along. Probably, at least once a month, there would be some sort of entertainment somewhere where folks could get in and get out of the... get in touch, to some extent, with real civilization.



*The silhouette of a saxophone player during a USO show at Marble Mountain in 1971. Tyler was experimenting with a new camera when he took this picture. "Everyone," says Tyler, "had to buy a high-speed camera."*

DePue: You mentioned that you had a chance, very briefly, to meet Bob Hope. Was there anybody else of note that you got to see or meet?

<sup>39</sup> Michael Joseph Jackson was an American singer, songwriter, and dancer. Dubbed the "King of Pop", he is regarded as one of the most significant cultural figures of the 20th century and one of the greatest entertainers. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Jackson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Jackson))

<sup>40</sup> Harold Lloyd Jenkins, better known by his stage name Conway Twitty, was an American country music singer. He also had success in the rock and roll, R&B, and pop genres. From 1971 to 1976, Twitty received a string of Country Music Association awards. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conway\\_Twitty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conway_Twitty))

Tyler: No, not of note at that point in time. Ended up flying part of the Bob Hope entourage from one place to another, from one major...because his was always big shows, so it would be from Da Nang to...Quang Tri to Da Nang, or something like that.

DePue: A Christmas show?

Tyler: Yeah, it was during the Christmas show thing that I flew. Did not see his show, but I flew part of that entourage. Spent more time with him in Hawaii, when he came through Hawaii while we were stationed in Hawaii. In fact, one of our airplanes that was flying part of that package ended up with a hydraulic failure and landed on a golf course. It was designated a hazard, so they're out there working on the airplane with golf balls bouncing off it (laughs).

DePue: Did you get a chance to have a mid-tour leave, an R&R?

Tyler: I took an R&R. It was an in-theatre R&R. Because of Carol's school, she and I agreed that it would not make sense for her to take time off to go to Hawaii because of finances, with her going to school and kids, or kid, and whatever else. We just thought, "Nah, I'll take an R&R." I went to Udorn, Thailand, spent three or four days there, maybe five days, and then came back in-country. That was my R&R.

DePue: What did you have a chance to do, once you went to Thailand?

Tyler: I bought some of the most God awful, ugly suits that you could ever see, a zoot suit. That was the days of bell bottoms, vests and three-button, plaid, large plaid, bright plaid suits. I bought two plaid suits and a zoot suit, as my wife called it—I came back; they hung in the closet forever (laughs). She wouldn't let me out of the house wearing them—walked around, ate too much hot Thai food, spent the time laying around the hotel pool, just relaxing with a whole bunch of Air America guys.<sup>41</sup> In my conversations with them, determined that going to work for "the company" in a civilian war was not necessarily a good thing to do because you get shot down, and you don't have your Geneva Convention Card; there's no rapid response company that's going to come and pick you up; there's no dust-off that's going to come get you, and you're kind of all by yourself.

I'm glad I had the conversation with the guys from Air America, flying helicopters out of strange places, because I could provide some firsthand knowledge to my son, as he was considering going to work for

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<sup>41</sup> Air America is an American passenger and cargo airline, covertly owned and operated by the US government from 1950 to 1976. It was used as a dummy corporation for the CIA. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air\\_America\\_\(airline\)\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_America_(airline)))

Blackwater or whatever else that was in Iraq and Afghanistan, as he was contemplating retirement from the Army.<sup>42</sup>

DePue: What kind of places was Air America telling you about?

Tyler: What they talked about was all sorts of places west of Vietnam, as they were flying into Vietnam and up and down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and—

DePue: That would be Laos and Cambodia?

Tyler: That would be my understanding.

DePue: And, of course, this was all secret?

Tyler: As secret as somebody wanted to talk about around a hotel swimming pool in Udorn, Thailand.

DePue: With a Marine aviator, who they might trust more than the average Joe.

Tyler: (laughs) Yes.

DePue: Were you one of those guys who were counting the days, keeping track of when you would be coming home?

Tyler: You all had a short-time calendar. You had a calendar on the wall, a short-timer's calendar, and you knew when your tour was up, certainly since we were individual replacements. Ours got scrambled a little bit because we were the last working bird squadron in-country. So, my calendar... I got shortened because I came out in May, I guess it was. So, clearly, I was short-toured. I didn't stay until the following October, which is when I was supposed to. But we were short-toured, and it became at the time, I ended up being part of the advance party to set up the squadron's arrival in Hawaii. So, I got out a couple to three days early, ahead of everybody else.

DePue: Reflecting back, what do you think was the worst part of your tour in Vietnam?

Tyler: Mondays, that's because you had your malaria pill on Sunday, so Monday you spent a lot of time in the head (laughs). But, certainly family separation was kind of the worst part of it. I didn't spend time dwelling about getting shot or any of that sort of stuff. I can tell you, it was some of the most rewarding flying I've ever done. I've said that a couple of times to you, that you felt like you were doing something for somebody, not just going out and having fun. You could see that you were making a difference for the people on the

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<sup>42</sup>Know, as Blackwater, Academi is an American private military company founded in 1997 by former Navy SEAL officer Erik Prince, renamed as Xe Services in 2009 and known as Academi since 2011 after the company was acquired by a group of private investors. The company provides security services to the United States federal government on a contractual basis. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academi>)



ground, both those in uniform and those who we were trying to make a better life for.

Other than always being... During monsoons, you were constantly wet; you never dried out. It was really frustrating. Those armored seats had kind of a... It was a ventilated seat cushion that actually had a blower on it so that it would circulate air through it, through the seat cushion. The Huey just had a mesh seat, just air was on the other side.

Ours, because we were in this armor-plated bucket, had this little cushion, and you turned a little blower on. But water would leak from the overhead window into your seat and saturate that thing. You'd sit down on it, and it'd be like sitting down on a wet sponge, and it'd go spissssh. Then you turned the blower on, and you kind of got a...almost like sitting in a hot tub, only it was cold water, all these little bubbles on your backside and on your back. (inhales sharply) It was pretty... That was not fun.

But I don't have bad, bad memories of the time over there. [There was] great camaraderie with the guys we flew with. That made Hawaii really special, when we came out-of-country into Hawaii because the unit came together. It was that unit cohesiveness that was torn apart by the way we threw people into it all the time. When we came to Hawaii, it was that unit cohesiveness. So, you had that cohesiveness in-country.

I can't think of... Really, other than family separation, the constant dirt and dust when it was dry, and the constant soaking wetness during monsoons. You'd be in seventy-degree weather, and you'd be freezing to death because it was just cold.

DePue: You talk with a great deal of pride about that experience. Do you have any regrets about serving in Vietnam?

Tyler: None.

DePue: Would you do it again?

Tyler: Yeah.

DePue: Under the same circumstances?

Tyler: Same circumstances. I'd like to do it as a more senior officer. I had a larger voice on how to do things.

DePue: You've already touched base on it a little bit, and apparently the whole unit came back to Hawaii. Tell us about that experience.

Tyler: We packed our embark boxes. The biggest challenge we had was getting the CO's jeep out of country because the CO's jeep was put together from

salvaged parts from China Beach and the Army junkyard. We had, over a period of several months, gotten pieces and put together an M151 Jeep, put tac marks on it and everything else, but it wasn't on our table of equipment. We didn't own it (laughs). And trying to get that on the boat, when you don't own it, was kind of... Nobody owned it because it didn't exist.

But we loaded up all our stuff, packed the classified gear and everything and moved everything back to Hawaii. Our airplanes were prepared for shipment and then transported by Navy transport, off-loaded at Barbers Point, Hawaii. And then we put the blades back on them, did pre-flights on them, test flown them and all that sort of stuff, flew them across the island over to Kaneohe Bay.

[We] moved into Kaneohe Bay, came out of country, and certainly very early on were getting ready for Fourth of July, as the squadron is getting there. I had picked up an old beater at the time, just an old Pontiac tank, Pontiac Bonneville tank, the grey beast that I had picked up for \$150 or something like this, just to get me around while we were running around.



*Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM) 262 deployed as a unit to Hawaii in May of 1971. The unit was stationed at Kaneohe Bay on Oahu. After two years of flying, Tyler was able to include this caption: 10,000 accident free hours, 12 May 1973.*

Carol was back in Illinois and we were trying to arrange for selling the car, getting her and Rob to the West Coast to catch a flight out—she went out of St. Louis and then to the West Coast and then on to Hawaii—and ship the household goods and all that. We ended up ... The unit went into Kaneohe Bay. There was a 53 Unit that was there; we were there, and it was basically a jet group at the time, at Kaneohe Bay.

DePue: Kaneohe Bay, is that where the Marines were based?

Tyler: Yeah, K Bay, and it was—

DePue: Is that close to Pearl Harbor?

Tyler: Other side of the island. In fact, it was the first place to get bombed during [the invasion of] Pearl Harbor because of where it sits on the north side.

DePue: So the Marines had been there for a long time.

Tyler: The Marines had been at K Bay for a long time and are still there. We're getting all set up there at K Bay. One of the neat things about Kaneohe Bay is it's a full Marine brigade on one base. If you look at most of the other places where you have Marine forces, you have—even Okinawa, and that's changing as we're moving off to Guam—but you have the air component, and [on] some other base, you have the ground component and maybe the service support squad, a group, with the ground component most likely.

By being the brigade all at Kaneohe Bay, you had the regiment; you had the group, and you had the combat service support, all on the same little peninsula of land. So, you had really a good mix of that Marine air-ground team stuff going on.

DePue: You've thrown some terms out here that most people could be confused about. A brigade had a—

Tyler: One star.

DePue: And the regiment, is that ground troops?

Tyler: That's ground troops.

DePue: And the group was the—

Tyler: Aviation, the aviation component. Remember the Marine Corps—

DePue: Only the one regiment in the brigade?

Tyler: Uh-hmm. Remember, the Marine Corps works on this air-ground team concept. We can do that at Marine air-ground task force, and that can be as small as a composite squadron, with probably a company, or maybe it might be a battalion, but often times a composite squadron with just a company or so or a little bit larger reinforcement, and a combat service support team with a command element. Then you move that up as you go.

The brigade is a group, a regiment and a combat service support thing. Then you get up larger than that, and you've got a force that then ends up a division and a wing. But the brigade is the only place where all those guys are at the same time.

DePue: Was this part of a division?

Tyler: No.

DePue: A separate brigade then.

Tyler: A separate brigade. It's First Marine Brigade, Kaneohe Bay.

DePue: What can you remember about when you saw Carol and your son for the first time, after a fairly long separation in combat?

Tyler: Picked them up at Honolulu, gave them their flower lei—Rob was just excited as the dickens—and we got to spend our time because we didn't have any quarters yet. And we didn't have any of our gear because that was going to come over on a slow boat from China. That kind of thing is the way all that stuff came.

We had what was known as temporary lodging allowance, TLA. We were at the Hale Koa, I think it was the name of it. I think it was the Hale Koa. It had the biggest... We'll be nice and call them water bugs, otherwise known as roaches, running around. I think we could put saddles on them and ride them. We remember that, because Hawaii's got a lot of single wall construction—that's the way a lot of things are made—the place wasn't air conditioned. So, here we are in this hotel room, and there were a bunch of kids in the pool playing "Marco Polo, Marco Polo, Marco Polo." It was, one, great to see Carol; it was great to reconnect with our two-year old and all that good stuff.

I suspect where you're going is that thing... When Carol did her master's down in Florida, one of the things she did is she looked at the women in the warrior's shadow and went all the way back from Plato, Plato's Republic all the way forward. One of the things she did in that was interview military wives. And one of the things she found in those interviews was all of the wives would describe themselves as strong, that the deployments and all that sort of stuff made them... While they didn't necessarily like it, they knew they were capable of surviving and doing without their spouse.

Of course, there's a little bit of adjustment. She's been going to school, doing the groceries, paying the bills, doing everything, and I wasn't there. Now, here I'm back, and long live the king (laughs). No, there's that adjustment period that you work through on every deployment. We had the same kinds of things each time I deployed and each time I came back.

DePue: You've been around the military most all of your life. I want to ask you about your own personal experiences, the way the civilian public met you in Hawaii as compared to the experiences you heard from other Marines or other soldiers coming back.

Tyler: Hawaii was really unique. You mentioned Watergate earlier because Watergate's going on while we're at Hawaii. One, there's the Hawaiian culture of, "Hey, bro, don't worry about it. If it doesn't get done today, we'll do it tomorrow. Relax, don't worry. Be happy, don't worry." So, you've got the island attitude going on, one, a little bit. Two, at the time we were there, our evening news... Walter Cronkite gets on the news, makes his news. They tape it; they put it in a can; they put it on an airplane; they fly it to Hawaii, and

we see it in the morning. It is not satellite delay. We aren't at the satellite delay timeframe.

So, all the stuff going on... We were more concerned about the rice being shipped from the Orient than we were stuff coming from the mainland, if you will, with the exception of toilet paper. When there was a dock strike in California and we had no toilet paper on the island, people got upset. Most of the time what happened on the mainland stayed on the mainland, and we didn't really care because the news was always a day late and so it was...

We avoided a lot of the garbage that was going on back in the mainland at that point in time. That was a blessing because we could focus... We were isolated; the unit could focus; the people could focus; the families could focus on what they were doing and not have all this other stuff out there messing with their minds and stuff.

The civilians in Hawaii liked having the military around. I think they still do, to some extent. The nudists out on the north shore didn't like necessarily us flying over their nudist camp. They'd take shots at us. Walking around nude with a shotgun, shooting at us, you know. (laughs) But other than that, it was a good place to come back to.

I've heard the stories that were reported. I did not have any of the anti-Vietnam, anti-serviceman stuff until I came back and was in DC area and was at NAVAIR [Naval Air Systems Command] when the commander in chief wanted us to not wear our uniforms every day, that what they wanted us to do...because they didn't want to have a strong military presence in the town. So, I had to go out and buy coats and ties. [I] still have to keep my uniform, allowed to wear a uniform one day a week.

DePue: You could have been wearing your zoot suits at that time.

Tyler: I could have been, but Carol wouldn't let me out of the house with them. (both laugh)

DePue: From everything you've said up to this point, it sounds like you didn't have any PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] or even perhaps a lot of the members of the unit probably didn't go through that. Would that be a correct statement?

Tyler: I would think that would be pretty true for our guys. We didn't talk about PTSD. Some of us... I can remember being in the back seat of somebody's car, because it was just before Fourth of July, and firecrackers went off close by. I was on the floor of the car pretty fast, okay? Now, that's kind of a reaction, but I got over that after a period of time. I won't call that PTSD. That's just, you kind of react to loud sounds. If you've been in combat, you kind of look for a hole somewhere to jump into when that happens.

I still remember, with a little... I don't know quite how to say it. I feel sorry for the poor young pastor, first tour pastor, that came to my door within about three months of me coming out-of-country and asked some of the usual leading questions about, "Well, what was it like?" and everything else. I just kind of opened up and just told him all this sort of stuff, about "Well, there was this, and there was that, and there was this" and everything else. I'm sure by the time he left, he said, "Boy, this guy's really weird" (laughs) and whatever.

That gets us to the things that we're seeing now with the guys coming back. Folks that haven't been there, folks that haven't seen... smelled the cordite, can't relate to the experience. It's good for our forces coming back from the sandbox and other places to get the opportunity. I think that's where the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and the American Legion in years past really served the folks that came back from World War II and other places because it was a place guys could go talk...not necessarily talk about the experiences but know that, if they said something about it, people aren't going to look at them and say, "Oh, you're just a druggie, baby-killing Vietnam vet. You're strung out on all sorts of illicit drugs, and you're a weirdo." But you don't have that same thing when you sit and talk to those folks. I don't know, I think I talked around where you're going.

DePue: Was there anything about your own personal experience, coming back from Vietnam and adjusting to life in beautiful Hawaii, that surprised you?

Tyler: I couldn't get enough flight time. I came back from a country where we're flying all the time, and we were drawing down. We had a squadron full of combat vets, and we were getting... I've got log books that I'll go maybe four hours a month, and aircraft commanders were flying as copilot because we didn't have enough hours to keep us current as aircraft commanders. That was really frustrating, being in a hollow force, that there just wasn't enough money.

I got selected for captain, and then promotions were frozen for a year. You're sitting there saying, WTF [What the F\_\_\_, Over]. You know? Come on guys. That was frustrating. But here again, remember the squadron came back, and for three years, for the most part, we were the same unit. We brought the wives; we had more babies; our daughter was born there; the unit had unit activities. So, we really had this very large family that was there. So making the adjustment was really kind of easy.

DePue: There are a couple of different directions I want to go with what you just mentioned here. The first one is, you talked about the laid-back atmosphere that you found, once in Hawaii. In Vietnam I suspect, you're a Marine; it's about getting the mission done; it's about making it happen. Was that a difficult adjustment to make?

Tyler: We lived on base. We flew off the base in support of... when we flew (laughs), we flew in support of the rest of the brigade, and you would support them in other places. There was a lot of activity. The squadron came back. The airplanes were old and tired and messed up. All of our embark gear was used. I ended up as the logistics officer in that timeframe, for part of that tour. We had to rebuild all of our embark boxes and reline the embark boxes.

DePue: Embark box being?

Tyler: Embarkation. On seventy-two hours' notice we could go anywhere in the world. So, we had in Hawaii cold weather gear; we had whatever else, all boxed up for a whole unit to be able to be put on some little gray boat that's run by the Navy, and the Navy taxi service takes us and drops us off on some faraway shore.

DePue: Is that all the Navy is to you guys?

Tyler: That is; they're just taxi service. But that meant all of your boxes had to be relined and the stuff put in them and all the tactical markings on them and all that. So, we had things to do to be busy, airplanes to maintain. And then, when we did get some airplanes, and we got some flying dollars and that sort of stuff, life got a little bit better.

At the same time, the CO and the command folks were saying, "Okay, you've been away. You've been gone. When you don't have something to do here, go home. Spend time with your family. Do something else. Just don't put time here just to be punching the clock. I want you to work, work hard while you're here, and then go do something else."

As you know, I had dropped out of college to enlist, so I ended up in night school, getting my bachelor's. I call it a bachelor's of underwater basket weaving. It's a bachelor's in general studies, a minor in psychology—because I tested out of a couple of psych courses—and a minor in military science because Chaminade gave me so many credits for being a commissioned officer. I went to school for most of the three years that I was there and got my bachelor's.

In those days, I was a reserve officer on active duty. I could not be in a regular establishment until we did what they call augment. I had to apply for that, and part of the application was you had to have good fitness reports and all that sort of stuff, recommendations. Certainly, if you didn't have a degree, you probably ought to be working towards one or get one. That was one of the motives for it. The second was, I knew if the Marine Corps wasn't going to keep me around after my tour was up, I wanted to be on the job market with a college degree, not less than that. So, that was two big incentives to stick in and get through.

It was funny, because with a baby and a toddler, a kid in the terrible twos... Kids don't necessarily need you to be in their space all the time, while they're running around at that age, and it's kind of hard to study with kids. So, I had the old turntable, stereo that we all had back then—kids don't know what a turntable is today—but I had one of those. And I had a headset with earphones. I would plug in, and the one that I think I listened to the most was Neil Diamond, "Hot August Nights," because I could just put that on, and it was enough white noise.<sup>43</sup> I could sit there and study, and the kids could be running around. Daddy was there, and that was fine, and I could study and block out all the noise. So, Neil Diamond got me through my bachelor's. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Was there a reduction of force going on at that time?

Tyler: Oh, big time, big time.

DePue: That has to be somewhat traumatic as well, wondering if—

Tyler: If I was going to have a job, yeah. When I joined the Marine Corps, I had no intentions of making it a career. In fact, as we mentioned, when I got commissioned—and I was talking about all the responsibilities that are attendant to special trust and confidence and a presidential commission and all that sort of stuff and what it means to lead Marines and everything else—on the night that I was commissioned...and I hadn't seen my wife in how many months and whatever else, and I talk her to sleep, duh! (laughs)

But talking about that... One of the things I said, "We'll stay in as long as it's fun." And it was for the most part, rewarding. I don't say I'd call it fun, but it was rewarding. I didn't have to question why I put on a uniform every morning when I got up to go to work. It was fun until the monitor called me up and said, "Colonel, what are your intentions? You're a mover this year."

I go, "What?" "When you're a mover, you need to go to Okinawa again unaccompanied." I said, "Been there, done that, a couple of times." "Well, yeah, but you're a mover." I says, "Why? I've got a doctorate, I'm sitting here in this thing, getting training devices for all the Marines, and you want me to go to Okinawa and be on a staff? You're not going to give me a command; you're not going to give me anything? I'm going to be counting tent pins somewhere?" "Yeah, you're a mover. You're overseas control date's ripe. You need to go."

DePue: A mover, meaning you're scheduled for—

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<sup>43</sup> Neil Leslie Diamond is an American singer-songwriter, musician and actor. With 38 songs making it to the Top 10 on the Billboard Adult Contemporary charts, Diamond sold more than 100 million records worldwide, making him one of the best-selling musicians of all time. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil\\_Diamond](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_Diamond))



Tyler: Scheduled for an overseas tour. And I go, "Is there another option?" He says, "Well, you could retire." And I says, "Let's see. I've got over thirty years in. Would you like that in writing, email, or does this suffice?" (laughs)

DePue: We've jumped ahead about two and a half decades in your career.

Tyler: We have. Yes sir, we have. Keeping me on track is a hard job, Mark.

DePue: Was Carol working while she was in Hawaii, or just having two kids at home was job enough?

Tyler: No, you can't keep her at home. As we said in many Christmas letters, years later, she finally got a job that made money. She did a little bit of substitute teaching in Hawaii, but the principal thing she did in Hawaii is she worked at Navy Relief. It's now Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society.

DePue: As a volunteer?

Tyler: As a volunteer. She was a interviewer. She ended up becoming the chairman of interviewers, where she would interview sailors and Marines that would come in. Hawaii's a high cost area, and young Marines and young sailors like to have their family or their girlfriends with them for some strange reason. If they weren't command sponsored, they did not get cost of living and other kinds of support to help them live on the economy. So, you'd have the kid that would come in and say, "Gee, I really need help getting a place for my wife" and whatever else. You'd say, "Are you command sponsored?" And, "No." "Well, we can't help you." Then two days later, the kid comes back in and says, "Gee, Mrs. Tyler, you wouldn't believe. Yesterday my wife was on the streets of Laredo, and today she's in Waikiki. I need help."

DePue: "Command sponsored" meaning what?

Tyler: That the Department of Defense... Hawaii was considered an overseas tour. If you go overseas, the Department of Defense pays for transportation of household goods, provides quarters, or if there's not enough quarters on base, provides you a housing allowance to live out in town, authorizes you to have your family with you. We do that when we go to Okinawa, Japan, your command sponsored dependents.

In foreign countries, when you're a command sponsored dependent, that also guarantees that, if hostilities break out or something happens, the Department of Defense is responsible to provide transportation to get your dependents back home. As non-command sponsored, you're on your own. You get yourself back.

DePue: My understanding is that that determination, command sponsorship, is essentially how long that individual is expected to be posted there.

Tyler: Yes and no. If you are command sponsored... You could be there the same amount of time. Most of the time, if you're command sponsored to have your dependents with you, it's a three-year tour. Most of the time, if it's an overseas unaccompanied tour, your dependents aren't sponsored, and you're only there for a year. You can extend for two or three without your dependents, but the command sponsorship is tied to your three-year tour. It isn't necessarily... You're denied that as a one-year guy, as an unaccompanied guy.

DePue: I assume you went to college on the GI Bill?<sup>44</sup>

Tyler: No, not there. I used tuition assistance from the...because they would pay for a portion of my tuition, and it was an on-campus thing. I saved my GI Bill benefits for later on.

DePue: Were you a member of the unit when you went to the next school assignment, or was that a permanent move for you?

Tyler: That was a permanent move, PCS back to Quantico to go back for... Are you talking about AWS?

DePue: Amphibious Warfare School.

Tyler: Yeah, that was a permanent change of station.

DePue: Tell me about that step.

Tyler: There's some politics that come into that before I get to AWS. Based on our conversation earlier about how 46s fell apart and needed some reengineering to make that venerable airplane last longer. I applied for and was accepted to Navy Test Pilot School. I was given orders to go to Navy Test Pilot School but because—

DePue: Which is where?

Tyler: Patuxent River, Maryland. But because I had gone to Army Flight School and not the Naval Flight School, they would have to send me to Pensacola [Florida] for some ground training and ten hours in flight time in a T-28 and ten hours of flight time in probably a T-2, maybe an A-4, whatever, but some jet aircraft. That was all worked out. If I had been an Army officer, that's exactly what I would have done. I would have done that en route to Patuxent River and be done.

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<sup>44</sup> GI Bill refers to any Department of Veterans Affairs education benefit earned by members of Active Duty, Selected Reserve and National Guard, Selected Reserve and National Guard Armed Forces and their families. The benefit is designed to help servicemembers and eligible veterans cover the costs associated with getting an education or training. (<https://www.military.com/education/gi-bill/learn-to-use-your-gi-bill.html>)

I had a phone call from some Navy captain at Patuxent River. He told me to pack my stuff. We rolled up our carpet because we had purchased carpet remnants, so that I could move with it to make government quarters a little bit nicer. I had rolled up the carpet, or had it cleaned and rolled up, staged our gear so that the 500 pound shipment could go ahead. The personal, light gear, ship it to go somewhere else, and a long-term shipment. [I] had this set of orders ready to go to Pensacola.

Then all of a sudden, I get this phone call that says, "Oh, by the way, young, hard charging Captain Tyler, you're not going because you didn't go to Navy Flight School, and you're not a real naval aviator." I kind of came unglued and said, "I was good enough to get shot at and good enough to whatever, but I'm not a naval aviator? Okay."

It seems that the congressional delegation from Florida felt it was important to leave Whiting Field open, which is the Navy's helicopter base. If they allowed that naval aviators who went to Army Flight School were just like any other naval aviators, then there would be no reason to have two flight schools, Fort Rucker and Whiting Field. Therefore, it was determined that, within the naval service, the 200 or so of us that had gone to Army Flight School were not real aviators and couldn't have normal progression in some of the other things, unless we decided to go back through Navy Flight School.

At the time, there was... I'm supposed to move off the Island. The monitor has to do something with me. So, they sent me to Amphibious Warfare School for a year (laughs) while they sorted all this out, instead of going to Patuxent River. As an unhappy camper, I show up at Amphibious Warfare School, learning all the wonderful things about amphibious operations in the Marine Corps.

DePue: Which sounds to me like it's a lot more being infantry than it is an aviator.

Tyler: Yes, but it's that step up from just being ground tactics and map reading and how do you even deploy things. It's looking at how do I load a ship; how do I put the equipment on? And it's moving forward from tactics a little bit to some... Certainly I think you'd say we spent most of our time worrying about creating operational orders, writing the typed paragraph order, the detailed order, becoming very familiar with the FM, FM 3-1, which is the Fleet Marine Force's Manual 3-1, which is the manual on how you write operational orders and how you load a ship, unload a ship, prepare all that sort of stuff, looking at how you write fitness reports. We did the human relations training. We did all that administrative stuff you learn to be a staff officer, a junior staff officer on some of these commands, to be able to do that.

DePue: In other words, this is primarily classroom work.

Tyler: Yes, all classroom work. The closest thing we had to anything that was field tactics was... There were two things, one legitimate. We went around to many of the Civil War battlefields in northern Virginia, Pennsylvania area to look at terrain and do terrain appreciation. Then we also did terrain appreciation classes on a routine basis at the local golf course. (both laugh)

DePue: This isn't Quantico you're doing this course?

Tyler: And I don't play golf, so—

DePue: That's a one-year tour. Was it accompanied?

Tyler: It was a one-year, accompanied tour. We lived on base. An interesting side note to that, the housing area... The same base where I went to OCS, I'm there for AWS. I go back at the end of my career, certainly while we were back in DC after I'd retired, and they have razed the barracks where I did OCS; it's gone. And they have completely demolished the whole neighborhood where we lived at AWS and built new houses and new streets and everything else. So, it's as if I never went there.

DePue: Which is why it's good to talk about the history of the place.

Tyler: That's right.

DePue: This is probably a good place for us to stop today, and then we can finish off with the rest of your career, quite a long and illustrious career, shall we say? But I think we've got at least one more session to go.

Tyler: Okay, super. Thank you, sir.

DePue: Thank you.

[end of transcript #3]

Interview with Robert Tyler

# VRV-A-L-2013-102.04

Interview #4: December 20, 2013

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, December 20, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I've got my fourth session with Colonel Robert Tyler, and we're in his beautiful residence here in Decatur, Illinois. Good morning.

Tyler: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: I think we're going to be able to finish up your career, although we've still got a lot to cover. And you just mentioned that you'd like to take a step back to start us today.

Tyler: Just a step back because we spent all this time talking about flying, and everybody thinks that it's all this hard work and everything. But there's often times some funny anecdotes that go along with it. When President Nixon came to Hawaii, stopped in Hawaii in Air Force One on his way to China and back from China on those two different trips he made in the early seventies, our squadron had just come back, 262 had come back from Vietnam.

We were looking for a mission in the Islands. We had two or three of our senior officers in the squadron that had been former presidential helicopter

pilots. So, they had flown with HMX.<sup>45</sup> We're sitting there and looking at the Island, with all these admirals and generals on it and says, "You know, we can carve out a mission and get some flight time if we take some simple material and pretty up the inside of our airplanes and make them helicopters with airline seats and carpeting and panels and all that sort of stuff on the side." So, we'd made a couple of those. When the word got out, we're into this business of hauling admirals and even Bob Hope around and others—

When Nixon comes to town the first time, he landed at Kaneohe Bay because that's a secure base on the north side of the Island, the windward side. He lands. I happened to be the operations duty officer planning this, and we were at a table. It was a Saturday morning, and we had this big platform that we worked out of, this big desk. At the beginning of the day, behind it we had nine different radios, and two of us were keeping track of all of the helicopters coming in with the dignitaries on them. They all had to land by order of seniority, you understand that. They had to have the transportation that took them from the helipad down to where the president was going to land.

It's a Saturday morning, so the crews and other people are standing around. At the beginning of the day there was a picture taken. All of them were looking at a TV set in the ready room, watching Saturday morning cartoons. By the time we landed the last four-star admiral, everybody was turning around, watching this scene behind the desk as we were orchestrating all of this stuff going on.

As Nixon was leaving, what became interesting... I happened to be on one of the flights carrying the strap hangers, all of the press and the baggage and all that sort of stuff. They were put up in a resort hotel on the other side of the Island. They needed to be picked up and flown over to put on Air Force One. So, we go over, and we land on the golf course, and these guys load up.

As we're taking off, the first guy comes up, and you hear over the radio, "Hey, check out the balcony on the eleventh floor." You start counting up. Tourists forget that those balconies are not as private as they think they are. When we woke them up at 7:30 in the morning, and they came out in their skimpy clothes, it was quite a scene. So, we got to wave and embarrass young ladies in their skimpy little nothings at the same time and have some chatter over the radio at that.

I don't know where that's going to fit in your story of things that we do, but always be careful when you're in a Hawaiian resort and a helicopter lands on the golf course.

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<sup>45</sup> Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1) is a United States Marine Corps helicopter squadron responsible for the transportation of the president of the United States, vice president, heads of states, DOD officials and other VIPs, as directed by the Marine Corps and White House Military Office.

DePue: Unlike many people, whenever you think of Richard Nixon, you automatically start thinking about skimpily clad young ladies on balconies.

Tyler: On balconies in Hawaii, in paradise, yes sir. (both laugh)

DePue: Let's jump forward a few years. When we finished last time, you were talking about the Amphibious Warfare School, not necessarily where you wanted to go. But after the Amphibious Warfare School, did you get to where you wanted to go?

Tyler: Because of the flight school thing and political decisions about where flight schools were and things, I went down and did a jet transition at Meridian, Mississippi. That wasn't my first choice. I would have probably wanted to stay in 46s forever. That airplane is just now being retired. That was a fun aircraft; that's where my friends were; that's where my combat experience was, et cetera. But the needs of the Marine Corps and the politics of it said I needed to do fixed wing training. So, I did.

DePue: This is an Air Force School?

Tyler: No, this was Navy. This is Navy Training at NAS [Naval Air Station], Meridian, Mississippi, which has now been converted, thanks to BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure], to a community college. It looked like a community college when we were there.

We started out flying the T-2 and all of the good things with flying yet and learning a new set of skills to fly, including care quals [carrier qualifications] and all that good stuff. Then [there was] advanced jet training, also at Meridian, the VT-7 [training squadron seven], flying the TA-4.<sup>46, 47</sup> As we flew around in it—

That's a fun little airplane. I told Carol for years afterwards, if I could do anything, I'd love to have my own A-4 in the backyard, next to my oil well, so I could afford the gas to put in it and go places because it's a fun little airplane to fly. You sit forward of the delta wing, and you can look out on either side and see the ground. Really, it was fun flying.

The atmosphere wasn't a good atmosphere, as far as I was concerned, because, as a senior captain naval aviator, I basically took my wings off for the year I was down there. If I'd have flunked out of Flight School, I would have lost my wings. So, there was some pressure there at the same time. But I did well, and when it came time to graduate from there, the news clipping that

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<sup>46</sup> First flown in 1958, T-2 Buckeye jet trainer aircraft were produced for the U.S. Navy by North American Aviation at Columbus, Ohio. T-2 trainers were used by the Naval Air Training Command to conduct basic jet flight training for future Navy and Marine Corps aviators. (<https://fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ac/t-2.htm>)

<sup>47</sup> The initial two seat Skyhawk took to the air for the first time on 30 June 1965... TA-4J's were also used as adversary aircraft at the Navy Fighter Weapons School. (<https://usslexington.com/aircraft/ta-4-skyhawk/>)

was sent back to my hometown newspaper said something to the effect, “Captain Robert Tyler, a Marine Corps second lieutenant, earns his wings of gold.” I thought, It’s the standard boiler plate thing. They missed the fact that a captain can’t also be a second lieutenant. (both laugh) But I got my real wings, and that was—

At the time, having gone through that training, I kind of wanted to get into the Harrier because, once again, it’s that close air support role.<sup>48</sup> If I’m going to do fixed wing, let’s get close to the troops and all that sort of stuff.

DePue: Isn’t that the overwhelming role, that Marine aviators who are jet qualified would be doing some kind of close air?

Tyler: All of it’s close air support in some way or other; it’s part of the air-ground team. But that particular one, because it’s a vertical takeoff and landing aircraft, actually works in austere fields oftentimes, with really ashore and with the units a little more closely than the carrier-based ones will at other times. At the time, we had known several classmates that had ended up in crashes with them. It had some problems in the hover and some other things. Carol kind of says, “I’ve never really complained about what you’ve flown or what you do, but I’m really uncomfortable with you doing that. I really wish you’d think about something else.”

I ended up... Once again, her wisdom—like when I was at the Basic School—prevailed, and I went into the C-130 community, out of Meridian, partly because it’s an airplane that goes faraway places with strange sounding names, has a crew that you work with all the time, and every mission is a little different, and you’re doing something, as opposed to just...<sup>49</sup> In jets, you tend to fly out of your home base; you go to some restricted area; you do some *au flugerons*, fight the airplane a little bit, drop some bombs—

DePue: You’d do what?

Tyler: Au flugerons. That’s one of those technical terms— (laughs)

DePue: That you’d only hear Marine pilots around the bar talking about?

Tyler: Yeah, when they’re fighting with their hands, okay? But it’s that upside down, all around, twisty-twirly... You can talk all about the fancy squirrel cages and everything else, but just au flugerons [aerial maneuvers]. You get done with those; you come back; you do a few touch and goes, and you park it

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<sup>48</sup> The Harrier, informally referred to as the Harrier Jump Jet, is a family of jet-powered attack aircraft capable of vertical/short takeoff and landing operations. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrier\\_Jump\\_Jet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrier_Jump_Jet))

<sup>49</sup> The Lockheed C-130 Hercules is an American four-engine turboprop military transport aircraft designed and built originally by Lockheed (now Lockheed Martin). Capable of using unprepared runways for takeoffs and landings, the C-130 was originally designed as a troop, medevac, and cargo transport aircraft. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed\\_C-130\\_Hercules](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_C-130_Hercules))



and put it in the barn for the night and go out the next day and do the same thing.

In the 130 world, every day you'd end up going to Rota, Spain, or Keflavik, Iceland or somewhere. You got to do something different. I thought that was good. Plus, the 130 community, at the time, had a real problem in a downsizing force, with maintaining its senior officers because the junior officers would very quickly get out to go to work for airlines like Braniff Airlines. Braniff tended to be civilian-Marine Corps west, and you couldn't... Kind of like one of the recent politicians says, "How's that working for you now, buddy?" (laughs) Yes, they've been bought out a couple of times.

DePue: Before you get too much further into this, I did want to ask you... From your perspective, you've talked already in quite a bit of detail about the aerodynamics of flying the helicopter, the CH-46 especially. How was it different flying a jet? And now you're talking about flying a much larger aircraft but a prop aircraft?

Tyler: They all have their different aircraft dynamics. Once you get any of them in the air and flying and have speed, they all fly sort of the same. They kind of got a stick; you move the stick around, and you feel it, and it works the same way.

What becomes different in a helicopter is certainly when it comes into a hover. You can't turn a 46 upside down because it's a flare, particularly the rotor system and all that sort of stuff that we don't want to get into. The blades will flap the wrong way and chop itself up. Rigid rotor systems can, in fact, invert, sometimes. (laughs)

Not all fixed wing airplanes can invert either because when they get inverted, they run out of oil and gas and other things because the oil dumps to the top of the engine instead of the bottom of the engine, and bad things happen to your motor. You have to have systems that allow you to do the au flugerons, if you will, in fighting the airplane.

The dynamics of flying them, once they're up to flying speed, kind of seems like the same. You have to appreciate the size of it, where you are, and what you're doing. And then you have to appreciate some of the uniqueness in a delta wing versus a straight wing or whatever, but those come in the airplane. I don't think there's—

The things you spend time worrying about in transitioning from one airplane to the other is the uniqueness of them. The roll rate in the A-4, you just hit it, and it just will do a complete 360° roll very quickly. Put that same amount of control movement in a 130, with a 132-foot wing span, it takes time to move that mass, if you can understand. I know others listening can't see the

hands move, but you can appreciate 132 feet versus 30-some feet and the ability for things to—

DePue: But the aircraft was never designed to do those kinds of maneuvers in the first place, was it?

Tyler: That's right; that's right. When I've been places where I've had the cargo compartment full of passengers in a 130, and they're air crew or they're maintenance types from an F-4 squadron that we're moving across the Pacific, and you come over the field, and you do an overhead brake, they're used to seeing their jet fighters come over the runway at all Navy-Marine Corps bases, roll it up 90° angled bank, pull four Gs coming around the corner to slow down, dissipate their air speed, dirty up, lower the landing gear and then land. Oh, that's always cool. That really looks cool.

In the 130, you're limited to 60° angled bank. But if you're in the belly of that airplane when it's rolling 60°, all you see out of that little hole on one side is sky, and all you see out of the other side is ground. You feel like you're rolled up. You pull about two Gs and, of course, sitting in those canvas seats, they go, "Ohhhh, let me up." They can feel all the weight on their body, and they love it. They love when you do that because they get the feeling that they see their pilots doing.

But you end up learning the different characteristics of the airplane and what's unique about them. In flying the A-4, it's a carrier-based airplane, so in the Navy-Marine Corps, you don't flare the airplane when you land it. You learn a whole new set of skills that you fly the airplane all the way to the ground and in.

DePue: Is the A-4, the Harrier?

Tyler: No, the A-4. The Harrier is the AV-8. But the A-4 was the TA-4 that I was flying in Meridian. Of course the 130 is a transport airplane. Unless you're doing short field ops with Special Forces or something like that, you're going to flare it all the time anyway to touch it down, a little more like an airliner. But then you're going to be concerned... In that one, what you spend your time dealing with is getting the sight picture for how to land and how to employ the aircraft, as far as air flight refueling, and how to work the receivers around you. That's the stuff you spend more time with, rather than the aerodynamics of flying it.

DePue: Here's the ultimate question for you. As an aviator who has flown three distinctly different kind of aircraft, is it easier to transition from being a helicopter pilot to a jet pilot or vice versa?

Tyler: I think it's probably easier to go from helicopter to jet, to some extent. Coming fixed wing to helicopter, even in Vietnam, I could tell those people that were Army trained versus Navy trained because, once you've flown fixed

wing, air speed is your livelihood. That's what keeps you alive. You don't get below a certain speed, or the aircraft stalls and falls out of the sky, and you just made your wife a widow. So you don't like to do that. But getting people who have flown fixed wing aircraft—

DePue: At what speeds typically?

Tyler: Depending on the airplane, depending on the wing configuration, most of your civilian airplanes, that's like eighty knots or so. It's sixty-five or eighty knots, somewhere in that area. The A-4, if it's loaded, probably around 110, 120 knots. In fighting that—

DePue: I thought it was much higher than that.

Tyler: No. And the C-130 lands at about ninety-seven knots is about the lowest you ever want to get it in the air. The A-4 at altitude, you never got it below 110 knots, fighting it, when you're in a vertical fight. When you get somebody in a helicopter, and you're going in to a zone with trees around it and everything else, you can just see them break into a sweat when they get below 100 knots. You're pulling the nose back and trying to come into a hover because it's unnatural.

Simple little things will sneak up and bite you in either category though. I was well into my fixed wing training, doing well. I'm going along one day, feeling fat, dumb and happy, sitting in the cockpit just zipping along. We're doing a rendezvous on somebody, and you're coming out... In a helicopter, when you're joining on your wingman who's in front of you, if you tipped your tip path plane up a little bit and gave it a little power, it would be like those speed brakes we talked about. It'd stop you, and then you could roll it right over, and you'd stop right there.

If in a fixed wing you roll it up, that increases your angled bank. You give it a little power, it's, "I got the lead." I surprised myself one day in doing that, because I was just sitting there so comfortable, and I did a learned response from my helicopter days, even though I was now 100 hours or so into flying jets. This old habit from 1,000 hours of flying helicopters jumps up and grabs you. You're always fighting against old learned habits and where you are.

I think the other thing, [with] all of your airplanes, you learn... The good pilots learn how the airplane talks to you. I talked about Mikey Howe and how he commented in going from the F-4 to the F-18. The F-4 squeaked and rattled and grumbled and vibrated at certain air speeds, and you just knew where you were. Without looking at an air speed indicator, you knew what it was doing.

You went to the F-18; it's all electric, and it's all quiet. It doesn't make the same noises and whatever else. He says, "You didn't know what you

were doing. I could fight the F-4, and if I wanted to cross control it to do some strange au flugeron again out there to be able to fight, to invert the airplane or do something,” he says, “I knew how to cross control it and do that. In the F-18 I do it, and the computers take over and say, ‘Okay, you want the nose to go here and the tail... Okay, we’ll do that,’ and they’ll do different things.” It’s, “Learn the airplane that you’re in.” I think [that] makes the difference. That was a long-winded answer. I’m sorry. (both laugh)

DePue: Maybe you’ve said this in a different way, did you get qualified then to take off and land on aircraft carriers?

Tyler: Oh, yes sir, great fun. In fact, right there you see, I am a tailhooker.<sup>50</sup> I managed to land aboard the *USS Lexington* the requisite number of times on my birthday, back in 1970... Is that six on there? Nineteen seventy-five, yes sir.

DePue: Is that something you did a lot once you got to a duty assignment or did none of it?

Tyler: No, because 130s, except—

DePue: It would be a bit awkward landing a 130 on an aircraft carrier.

Tyler: But they have done that. We did that to prove that it could be done. But the only problem was, they had to take so much weight out of it and stuff out of it to be able to stop aboard the carrier that it was not practical to do that, and there’s no tailhook on it.

DePue: After the training, after the school, where did you go next?

Tyler: Went to... Short stop for C-130 training and then ran off in to the 130 world, out of El Toro, California, the Marine Corps Air Station in El Toro, VMGR-352.

DePue: VMGR, what would that stand for?

Tyler: Marine, fixed wing... It’s Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352.

DePue: Is this a classic C-130 or a KC-130?

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<sup>50</sup> Tailhooker refers to a military pilot who has landed on an aircraft carrier using a tail hook to catch the arresting wire on the flight deck. (<https://www.amazon.com/Tailhooker-Pre-Flight-Willard-G-Dellicker/dp/150894234X>)

Tyler: KC-130. All of the Marine Corps, part of the Air Force or Department of Defense, Status of Agreement or Status of Forces Agreement kind of thing. We could only fly... Less than, I think,



*A KC-130 from VMGR-152 (Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron) at Fatema, Okinawa lands on a Johnson Atoll west of the Hawaiian Islands in 1977. The U.S. used the atoll to store and destroy chemical weapons.*

10 percent of our flights could be logistic flights for hauling stuff. That's an Air Force mission. That's why they've got their C-5s and 141s.

Ours were all tankers. all the Marine Corps 130s are tanker aircraft, designed with two drogues. Navy-Marine Corps tankers use the little basket that goes out, and then the receiver has a probe that pokes into it. That's how they pass their gas. The Air Force is in the business, for the most part, of refueling big airplanes. So they use the big drogue, with a hard lock to the other things. We don't do that.

DePue: The drogue is the device that's used for refueling that we would see tailing out from the end of the aircraft?

Tyler: Yeah, yep, trailing our hoses and passing gas all across the Pacific, yes sir (DePue laughs).

DePue: Lots of jokes in that one, aren't there?

Tyler: (laughs) There are, and we won't go there.

DePue: But you've heard about a million of them I'm sure.

Tyler: We have indeed, yes sir.

DePue: You're flying KC-130s, and you're in the middle of one of those missions. I would think that's straight, flat and level kind of flying.

Tyler: Yeah, if you're doing the refueling, although you end up on a refueling track. So you're turning, and it's formation flying most of the time. In the late seventies and early eighties, the Marine Corps was into unit rotations

throughout the Pacific. We would move squadrons, whole squadrons, from the West Coast to the East Coast.

An F-4 can't make it from California to Hawaii without stopping for gas twice, and there's no place to stop along the way. So, we would launch out four tankers. Then a little bit later, we'd launch out four more. There'd be a pathfinder aircraft, like a C-9. It's a DC-9 that you're familiar with; it's the same kind of airplane. It would take off as a pathfinder, but it would have maintenance crews and spare pilots and all that sort of stuff onboard.

Then the receivers themselves, the F-4s, would take off. They would join up on the pathfinder. Because the F-4s, at the time, did not have long range nav systems, they could only figure out where the pathfinder was, get onboard with the pathfinder, who had overwater nav systems. They would streak up, join on him, and then go ahead of him when they got to the first Aerial Refueling Control Point, the ARCP. They would descend, come down. We'd fill them up with gas, off of our aircraft. While they were getting their gas, because they would have to slow down, the pathfinder would stream overhead, move on down across, down range where they were going. They'd get their gas; they'd climb back up.

The reason they'd have to descend to get to us, we couldn't get above about... Because we're turboprops, we're not efficient above about...really much above the mid-twenties. So, flight level two five zero, whatever. We can get up to three one zero, but we can't get the speed that they need for refueling. So, most of the time we did the refueling in the low twenties, around there.

Sometimes we'd even get into a spot where we'd toboggan with them, and they'd get heavy. We'd start descending so they wouldn't have to use as much power to stay at altitude. They'd get their gas, break off from us, climb up, join the pathfinder, stream ahead of the pathfinder, go to the second ARCP, get gas again, and then from there, on into Hawaii. We'd repeat that going from Hawaii to either Wake... We seemed to use Wake a lot; sometimes we'd go through Kwajalein.

We've used Midway once or twice, but the gooney birds had taken over Midway. I mean our feathered friend gooney birds. They're dumb. They'll just sit right in the middle of a runway. If that's where their egg was hatched, they'll just sit there. They're endangered species, and you have to avoid them. It's kind of hard to avoid them when you're taking off. I think one particular trans Pac [Pacific], we ended up losing three or four engines, as birds got sucked down intakes. We decided Midway is really not the way to try and get across the Pacific.

DePue: That's just a postage stamp in the middle of the ocean, isn't it?

Tyler: Just a postage stamp in the middle of the ocean, as is Kwajalein, as is Wake Island. Wake Island runway runs from one end of the ocean to the other end of the ocean. That's it. There's ocean at both ends of the runway. Don't land short, and don't run off the end of the runway.

DePue: You've described a lot of different kind of aircraft that the Marines have, and in many cases the Air Force and the Navy were working as well. My gut tells me that being a pilot for a KC-130 wasn't seen as being as sexy as some of these other aircraft that you could have been flying.

Tyler: That's a truism. It was a workhorse; it was a trash hauler. We carried stuff, certainly, in theatre when we were stationed in Okinawa later on. We supported all the wing units and the ground units with hauling, resupply. It's a little bit like Vietnam, only on a larger scale. It doesn't have the same swagger. You don't have that torso harness that's pinching you in spots you don't like to have pinched, so you don't have a swagger that comes with it.

Carol used to talk about the different flight suits. The helicopter flight suit was always covered in oil and hydraulic fluid and was sweaty and dirty. The jet flight suit would kind of sit in the corner by itself, full of body sweat and salt because you ended up sweating so much in that. And the 130-flight suit would always have one side of it that was more sun bleached than the other because that's the side of the airplane you sat on, and the sun got you all the time. And she probably complained about the spilled meals on the lap from sitting there eating while you're going across the Pacific or wherever.

DePue: Were you disappointed when you initially ended up in K-130s, or did you adjust your attitude to that?

Tyler: I wasn't disappointed because I loved flying the airplane; I loved what we were doing. We were busy at the time. We'd go out for six weeks on a trans Pac, come back, spend equal amount of time back and go do it again. There was good flight time; there was good camaraderie on it. You had crew members that...

The routine of the flight, you'd end up with snacks on climb-out, the Pop-Tarts.<sup>51</sup> A load master was really good about doing that. You'd have... Coming off the refueling, as soon as we could turn the galley circuit breakers back on, because you needed the electricity to run the pumps for the refueling, he would put fresh nachos in there. So you had this great camaraderie going on. You'd go to Wake Island and sit around and watch *Carrie* on a screen on

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<sup>51</sup> Pop-Tarts, a brand of toaster pastries introduced in 1964, have a sugary filling sealed inside two layers of thin, rectangular pastry crust. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pop-Tarts>)

the beach, and get the dickens scared out of you.<sup>52</sup> She comes out of the sand; you sit there.

When you got four or eight tankers out there, you're running crews... Without your maintenance crew, you're running a crew of seven or eight folks, maybe nine folks because you've got some training folks and everything else, at times eight airplanes, plus the maintenance detachment that's going along and everything else. It's kind of like moving with your whole family the whole time. So, you had good camaraderie, good flying.

Have you been to Kwajalein? Have you been to Bikini Atoll? Have you been to Wake Island? Have you been to Midway? Would you want to go to any of those? That's the other question. For a Marine to be able to fly over Guadalcanal, to fly in and out of all those Mariana Islands out there and some of the times to go to Guam and different places to see those, that's kind of reliving our Pacific history at the same time.

Some of that was kind of fun. Walking around Wake Island and looking at bunkers and different concrete things that were shot up and pitted and whatever else, walking around Midway and those different places like that, it was really kind of fascinating.

DePue: What was the next duty assignment for you?

Tyler: Okinawa, flying with *Ichi Go Ni*, 152, VMGR-152. In fact, you're drinking coffee out of one of their cups right now.

DePue: *Ichi Go Ni*?

Tyler: *Ichi Go Ni*, Japanese for one, five, two. And doing the same kind of missions, except out of there we were just supporting the Marine division on Okinawa and the deployed troops.

Later on when I was over there—that was in the late seventies—when I was over there again in the eighties, and I was the XO and Ops O of the support group, the Marine Wing Support Group, MWSG-17, is supporting the Marines that are in the Philippines, the Marines that are on Guam, the Marines in Korea, the Marines in Iwakuni, and the Marines on Okinawa, Iwakuni, Japan. So, we would end up having these flights—we called them FISDU's or FISDUK's, depending on which it was—flights in support of deployed units. The FISDUK was deployed units, Korea, added to it.

You would end up taking... If they needed parts for their forklift, if they needed extra Marston matting for the runways, any of that sort of stuff,

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<sup>52</sup> *Carrie*, a 2013 American supernatural horror film, is a modern re-imagining of Stephen King's novel about a shy girl outcast by her peers, who uses her telekinetic powers with devastating effect after being a victim of a cruel prank at her senior prom. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrie\\_\(2013\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrie_(2013_film)))



you'd fly in support of these deployed units, all throughout the Pacific Theater on kind of a two-day round robin, which is really kind of some decent flying. Once again, not just flying your local traffic pattern and the one or two restricted areas in the area.<sup>53</sup>

DePue: It does strike me that you're life as a Marine aviator is very different from what the general public would think about the average Marine doing and being.

Tyler: Most people don't even realize that Marines have airplanes. To understand that the Marine Corps has a small Air Force that's larger than many nations have, is... Yeah, most people don't understand that.

DePue: Was this an accompanied or an unaccompanied?

Tyler: Unaccompanied. Okinawa was unaccompanied.

DePue: How long were you there?

Tyler: One year.

DePue: And what was the time frame?

Tyler: July of, I think, seventy—

DePue: Seven is what you—

Tyler: Seventy-seven to seventy-eight, exactly 365 days if I'm not mistaken.

DePue: How tough was it to be on an unaccompanied tour at this stage of your career?

Tyler: You don't like it. I lived in a barracks. Well, not in a barracks, in a BOQ [Bachelor Officers' Quarter], a room all by myself. We had water rationing for part of that time because Okinawa, like an island, if it doesn't get enough rain, it doesn't have fresh water. So, I got to flush my toilets by taking water from my shower and pouring it into the commode. Got to take about three months' worth of tepid showers because they ran the water through the hot water but not enough to make it hot and turned off the cold water. That's how we lived for a while.

A friend of mine, who actually commanded the squadron on the... I relieved him at 352, when I took command of that. He ended up with 252 on

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<sup>53</sup> Marston Mat, more properly called pierced or perforated steel planking (PSP), is standardized, perforated steel matting material developed by the United States shortly before World War II, primarily for the rapid construction of temporary runways and landing strips. The nickname came from Marston, NC, where the material was first used. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marston\\_Mat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marston_Mat))

one half of the hangar and I had 352 on the other half of the hangar. Years later—

DePue: Was this later in your career?

Tyler: That's later...was there with me for that unaccompanied tour. He and I would go over to the officers' mess every night, and we would have pork flied lice, shlimp flied lice, or mixed flied lice, whatever it was. The Okinawan had difficulty with the "r" sound, so we ate a lot of "flied lice." (laughs)

My job there... I was the adjutant for the squadron. The CO liked to get out and fly a lot, so it was my job to sit outside of his office, take his phone calls, sort the traffic that came through so that he could go fly. He said, "Bob, you keep me out of trouble, and you'll get to go to Taipei for all of the weekend liberty runs."

You'd get to fly that mission, which you would fly to Taipei, Taiwan, with sixty-five, seventy or so liberty hounds in the back of the airplane, who would go down and do their shopping and bring their stuff back for a weekend of liberty, in-theatre liberty. That was a fun mission to go down and see Jimmy and Jimmy's cousin Jimmy, who were the taxicab driver and the hotel manager. It seems that was the only name that they knew. They were Jimmy and Jimmy and Jimmy. (laughs)

DePue: There are no "r's" in that, so they could say it.

Tyler: They could say it, so that's who they were.

DePue: What did you think of the Okinawan people? Essentially, are they just a different dialogue of Japanese or a completely different ethnic group?

Tyler: We were there as part of the transition, Okinawa back to Japan, as a Japanese protectorate or island or property or whatever you want to. We were there as they went from driving on the right side of the road, like we do, to driving on the proper side of the road, like the British and the Japanese do. That was an interesting challenge, to teach Marines how to drive big trucks on local streets on the other side of the road.

DePue: I suspect they were narrower streets.

Tyler: And they are narrower streets. Big six-bys just crunched the dickens out of little (laughs) Japanese cars in a heartbeat.<sup>54</sup> We enjoyed the Okinawan people that we got to know out in town, a friendly group of folks for the most part, out in the ville, around the different bases that were there. Kadena's there;

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<sup>54</sup> The six-by or 6x6 truck (G512, 514, 547, 569) was a family of heavy tactical trucks built for the United States Army during World War II. The basic cargo version was designed to transport a 6-ton cargo load over all terrain in all weather. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/6-ton\\_6x6\\_truck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/6-ton_6x6_truck))

Futenma's there; Camp Butler's there. All those camps and bases are right around there, the northern training area the Marines spent a lot of time in.

Politically, the Okinawans... It's getting to be a crowded island, and they wanted us off of there. We had some fights about that. Any time you had—

DePue: Fights?

Tyler: Well, fights. Let's just say verbal disagreements, not fight-fights, not fisticuffs.

DePue: Between Marines and Okinawans?

Tyler: At the political level. I shouldn't say fights, more disagreements, as far as "Are we going to stay?" "We want you to move off." Yet a large part of their economy is driven by dependents and the work that they do on our bases as contractor support and everything else.

The Marines have... If I'm reading all the message traffic that I'm seeing in the popular press now, we're in the process of relocating most of our forces to like Guam and another island a little bit off the coast of Okinawa, to allow them to have an island without our presence as much.

DePue: Would it be fair to say this is the beginning of some tensions between the native population and the Marines?

Tyler: Oh yeah, oh yeah. There was always probably some tension there because of a clash of cultures. The young servicemen take away all the local girls. They get married, and they run away to the United States, and they never go back. So, you have that clash going on, and you have the economics, "Do I really need these round-eyes here on my island?"

DePue: Where was Carol at the time?

Tyler: She was in Southern California. She went back. Our daughter started kindergarten, so Carol went to school with our daughter and worked as a teaching assistant or whatever for a while. And then, when Suzanne went off to first grade after I came back and everything else, Carol expanded her job into a different teaching role. It was just normal for our daughter to think "Mom goes to school when I go to school." Carol stayed back in the classroom for the most time after that, because the kids were in school, and she was in school at the same time.

DePue: So, she was close to El Toro—

Tyler: We were in Corona, on the other side of the Santa Ana Mountain Range in Riverside County. It was a thirty-one-mile drive to Okinawa on the—

DePue: Okinawa?

Tyler: I'm sorry, not Okinawa. In Southern California, there on the 91 Freeway, which is now a massive freeway. The day I left for Okinawa on that trip, she sat—she didn't sit—but my dad came over from San Bernardino and sat on the roof of our house with our hose because the forest fires were one mile away from the house. Yeah, that was an interesting time for me to be going away. As she said, the washing machine, the Volvo that we bought in Hawaii, and the forest fires always knew when I was leaving.

DePue: Was it basically understood that when a Marine gets a one-year deployment to a place like Okinawa, you're going to return back to where you came from?

Tyler: No. I had only been at El Toro for one year. I knew I was due to go to Okinawa probably after two years there. Then one day, the monitor called up and said, "Hey, we've got a shortage of pilots over there. We really need you guys." So, Wally and I got sent over actually a year ahead of when we thought we were going. We twisted his arm and said, "Promise us you'll send us back, so we don't have to yank up the family and everything else." He says, "You'll come back to El Toro at that time."

DePue: This is the assignments officer?

Tyler: That's the assignments officer.

DePue: Somebody in Washington, DC, that's making these decisions for you?

Tyler: Yep. That's the guy. You know, those guys inside of Washington who are there to help you? Those guys. (DePue laughs)

DePue: When did you return to El Toro?

Tyler: Summer of seventy-eight, and Carol promptly got me enrolled in my master's program. She ended up hearing about this program that her dental hygienist's husband, who worked for Disney, was doing at the time, in safety. She says, "That just sounds like you." So I was back in night school a couple of nights a week, and I would drive over, most of the time, to Norton Air Force Base and go to school. I worked on base and went to school at night, opposite direction, so I was driving a lot in Southern California. I was a typical Southern California person, sitting behind the wheel in my car.

DePue: This is a timeframe that... Looking back at it today especially, we're talking about the mid to late seventies. The Army refers to it as the years of the "hollow army." I heard you use the phrase, the "hollow force" earlier. I want you to reflect a little bit about what was going on, why that phrase was being kicked around.

Tyler: One, we were downsizing. Two, there wasn't enough budget money to sustain flight hours, maintenance hours for aircraft, maintenance dollars to repair them. You often times didn't have enough personnel to do the job. You were running 80-85 percent of the table of organization of people that you had, which meant you were short of the number of people to do the job that was there. People were working longer hours or whatever. You had policy being made as they tried to take care of budgetary issues, following the Vietnam era and all that sort of stuff and looking once again at more domestic issues rather than military issues. So, to a large extent, we bore the effects of those decisions, inside the beltway.

DePue: Was some of that a reflection of the general public's attitude about what had happened in the Vietnam War?

Tyler: I'm pretty sure it was. When, as we talked about, later—a few years, but not many years after that, but in the early eighties—the commander in chief didn't want us going to work in uniform in the Washington area. He wanted us in civilian clothes because we didn't want to have a military presence.

DePue: Did you see a significant rise in morale or discipline problems within your unit?

Tyler: (sighs) No, I don't think so. Morale in 352, or in El Toro in general, is kind of a tough thing to do. I talked about when you're deployed, you kind of had this nice little group that you went with on a trans Pac or whatever. Day to day, people lived from way out in the desert, in Riverside County and San Bernardino County, or down in San Diego or up in whatever or even in Orange County. Very few lived on base, so people didn't get together with the squadron. They got together wherever they were.

We lived in a civilian town. We did medical and everything else over at March Air Force Base—which is the other way—medical and commissary. Carol's... The people she worked with didn't have a clue what a Marine does because it was on the other side of the mountain, and nobody ever went over to the other side of the mountain, or nobody ever looked over the other side of the mountain.

So, morale was not necessarily... It wasn't the same as what we had in Hawaii; let's put it that way. It wasn't even the same closeness you had at AWS. But people came to work and did their job. The morale though... I think at the same time, and I reflect on that because it was... So many of our pilots were getting out.

It was one of the things I put the kibosh on when I became my own squadron commander. People would come in and post "Eastern was hiring." "Braniff was hiring." "Here's who you call for this." So, guys were getting their time, getting their airline transport rating, doing that stuff, and then

putting in their papers and getting out. The talk in the ready room was about who was hiring and whatever else. There was a lot of “I’m just almost spinning my wheels until I can go to a real job instead of this job in the military.” In that regard, I found it a little bit demoralizing while we were there. Carol and I had lots of conversations—

It was really good to get selected for major because at that point in time the conversation around our table, “Should I get out, or should I stay in? Should I get out, or should I stay in?” By that time, I was halfway through with my master’s; I’d been selected, and I knew if I didn’t do something terrible, I could at least have a career for as long as I wanted it, at that point in time.

DePue: Who was the person who was starting that conversation? Was it more you and your own thoughts about the possibility of getting out, or was it Carol?

Tyler: It was more me because I was looking at flying. Should I stay in the Marine Corps and put up with this garbage of not enough money, not enough flight time, et cetera—

DePue: Moving every year?

Tyler: ...and moving every so often, or do I want to go to work for the airlines? Table conversation was around that a lot. She got, “Will you just \_\_\_ or get off...” Get off this topic kind of thing. “It’s getting tiring talking about it all the time.” But the other thing... I keep saying, every once in a while, her wisdom comes through. She talked about it, and she says, “You complained, if you will, how it’s just boring, doing the same thing all the time. I can tell you the approach to Honolulu right now, and I can tell you what the Honolulu weather is probably, twenty-five, scattered; forty-five, broken; wind zero-four-zero at fifteen, gusts to twenty-five. And I can tell you the approach to that because you’ve flown it enough all the time.” She says, “I think you’d get bored because it’s the same thing, gear up, flaps up, autopilot on, heels up, seat back. Then you go to the other end...and not being able to bend the airplane around at all or do anything unique with it because you don’t want to spill the martinis in the back.” And she says, “I think you’d be a little bored with that.” And I think she was right. I had a lot more fun.

DePue: But the pay sounded like it would be better if you went to private—

Tyler: Oh, the pay sounded like it would be a whole lot better.

DePue: But, as a Marine aviator, you’re making better money than a Marine captain or a major who’s pounding the ground, aren’t you?

Tyler: Yeah. I do have that thing called flight pay.

DePue: Tell me about flight pay and what—

- Tyler: It started out as hazardous duty pay because everybody believes flying is so much more hazardous. Then it became career incentive pay, to keep us from jumping out to go to work for the airlines. And it's still there. Sailors get sea duty pay and whatever else to entice them to do that sort of work. The pay is not dependent on rank, but it's just what you get every month, thrown in your paycheck as a career incentive.
- DePue: Do you remember roughly what it would have been at that time, the late seventies?
- Tyler: A couple \$300 a month, about that. I don't know. It was never a big, big chunk of money, but it was always enough that it made a difference.
- DePue: I think February 1980 is the next step for you here, assignment is a squadron reception. Fill in the blanks for me.
- Tyler: Oh, okay. When I came back from Okinawa, I did not get back down into the squadron. I got plucked off to be the assistant admin officer of a group, which, as we've talked about before, the headquarters above multiple squadrons.
- DePue: And a different type of aircraft.
- Tyler: A different type of aircraft. We had A-6s, A-4s, C-130s within that group. It was an attack group, and I worked there, pushing papers and worrying about personnel assignments and everything else. From there, after about eighteen months there, I went over and became the officer in charge of the Joint Reception and Separation Center, which was a position and a facility that took in and in-processed everybody that came to the station, Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, and everybody that came to the tenant commands on that station who are part of the Third Marine Aircraft Wing that were there.<sup>55</sup>

I was processing all those people in and processing all the people out, issuing ID cards for all dependents and anybody...like you need your... You don't, but Su Youn needs her ID card every six years or whatever. You would come in with her, and I would issue her a new ID card with all the... So, I was an ID card facility.

We did out-processing in an early stage. I created an early stage of a TAP program, where I would bring in—that's a Transition Assistance Program—where I would bring in people from out in town to help young Marines learn how to do interviewing and be successful in interviewing, how to write their resume. how to look for jobs, where to look for jobs, for those who were transitioning out. For those who were coming aboard the station, we would help them with housing, getting their household goods shipped, settling

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<sup>55</sup>Units assigned to a base are often referred to as "tenant" units/commands. The base CO provides the support facilities for those units as they cycle between deployments. (Information provided by Robert Tyler following this interview.)

their travel claims, doing all that sort of stuff. It was one-stop shopping, people coming in and people going out.

DePue: What was the next assignment?

Tyler: The next assignment was a fun assignment at Maxwell Air Force Base, Air Command and Staff College, where I got to be one of six Marines. We spent a year there trying to help the Air Force understand what it is to be a Marine. (laughs)

DePue: But you're essentially a student during that time?

Tyler: A student the whole time. So, we got to learn... With the jointness in all of our military now, certain things inside the—

DePue: Joint, meaning that the various services are working together.

Tyler: Working together, yeah. Things inside the Pentagon run the same in all of them, so understanding staff process, understanding writing, understanding how to put together a point paper, understanding how to look at strategic deployment of things and not just tactical deployment within your own forces.

DePue: You had a full year there?

Tyler: A full year.

DePue: Is that one of those... Was that an accompanied tour?

Tyler: That was accompanied. Carol went with us and we had... Yeah, it was a good, relaxing time after being... I had graduated with my master's at that point in time. The kids had decent school experience.

It's in Montgomery, so you're in Old South, and even then, you had the dress shop for little girls [where] we were looking for a slip for our daughter to be in a wedding, a full-length slip. The clerk is helping Carol and Suzanne find this little slip. "Well, don't worry about it; we'll just send the bill to Daddy. We'll just send the bill to Daddy." Every time we went back there, Carol and Suzanne never had to worry about what it was going to cost. "They'll just send the bill to Daddy." (DePue laughs) It was Old South.

DePue: When Daddy gets the bill. (both laugh)

Tyler: Daddy paid the bill.

DePue: This is the beginning of the Reagan administration as well. I understand you had an opportunity to interview?



Tyler: I did. While they're looking for my post-command and staff tour, the monitor called up and asked, says, "We're considering you to be one of Reagan's military aides. How do you feel about that?" I said, "Sure, we'll talk about that." Interesting, out of that, they did a very thorough background investigation on Carol because her maiden name was Albrecht, and they wanted to make sure she had no family on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain to influence our decisions and stuff.

I came up for an interview on the second floor of the White House, interesting interview. You sat in a chair like... Well, a folding chair like you're sitting in, in the middle of the room. Four military aides, the Army, the Marine Corps, the Air Force, the Navy, and I think the Coast Guard was in there too, so five of them. They kept shooting questions at you for the whole time. It was an interesting interview.

I was on the short list. I am told that, because I was selected for lieutenant colonel, and they did not want the position to grow beyond the major level, that they chose a young major instead of me. But that was an interesting interview.

DePue: Did you have a chance in that experience of meeting the president himself?

Tyler: (coughs) I did not. I did not have an opportunity while I was there to do that, no.

DePue: We talked about the "hollow force," and Reagan is certainly known for rebuilding the military, once he got to the office. Can you talk about your views about all of that experience? Was it effective? Was it money that was being well spent?

Tyler: I was at Naval Air Systems Command in Washington, DC then, when I didn't get the White House thing.

DePue: So, you got posted to Washington, DC?

Tyler: I got posted to Washington, and I spent four years there at Nav Air as the C-130 class-desk officer. What that job entails, it's technically the systems and engineering. Let's see, it's class desk for systems and engineering or whatever. We were updating the airplane or taking care of the airplane. We were responsible for its rework cycle, being cared for, repainted, rebuilt, wing roots replaced so you could carry more weight, updating the avionics that was the original off the Santa Maria I think. We were updating that to something, not a full glass cockpit but certainly upgrading it so that we could get across the ocean without using the navigator with the sextant and doing that stuff.

In my job I got the benefit of some of those budgets that had more stuff in it to fix the airplanes that we didn't have fixed when I was at El Toro. And the class-desk before me had tried to fix the tacan [tactical air navigation

system], one of the nav systems, or had tried to fix a radio and whatever. He just had these piece-part little things that were there. But because of the Reagan budgets and stuff, I was able to take those things, combine them and put together larger packages that made sense for out-of-service time and whatever else. Over my time there, I spent several billion of your dollars on upgrading the Navy and the Marine Corps C-130s.

DePue: Was it money well spent?

Tyler: Very well spent because we kept using those airplanes... When I took command of my squadron, we had the first one of those modified airplanes completely modified while I was there. They were still using those modified airplanes until about two or three years ago in Afghanistan and Iraq and whatever else, just flying the wings off of them. So, yes, it was... It extended the service life of those airplanes, as opposed to buying new airplanes, for a good fifteen years.

DePue: It was something of a unique time to have that experience. Was it a heady time to be working in the Pentagon?

Tyler: It wasn't in the Pentagon. It was across the street from the Pentagon, over in Crystal City. I wouldn't say it was a heady time because Nav Air is full of civilian engineers. I was technically working for GS-15, as opposed to a uniformed guy.<sup>56</sup> It was just, get the work done and spending a lot of time... I'd spend a lot of time at Lockheed Martin. I'd spend a lot of time at other facilities who were doing rework on our airplanes and following up on the work that they were doing out there. I wouldn't say it was heady, but being able to take the input from the fleet... The reason Nav Air wanted us who had been in the fleet flying the airplane was they wanted the fleet input. So, I could go talk to the fleet. I could get the questions that they had or concerns that operators had and fix problems. It was kind of good. It was kind of fun.

DePue: In most military officer's career they figure out there's some time they're going to have to go spend some serious time in Washington, DC. Some people try to avoid it as much as they can. Others—perhaps some of the ones who are more ambitious for higher rank—are seeking out those opportunities. Where would you have been in that equation?

Tyler: (sighs) I operated under the needs of the Marine Corps. I did not ask for either one of my two headquarters tours. I accepted them when they came, as you kind of knew they were going to be there. I thought going to Nav Air was a good one that kept me in touch with the fleet, so I was still keeping my wings polished, (laughs) as opposed to letting them get tarnished sitting behind a

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<sup>56</sup> GS-15 is the 15th paygrade in the General Schedule (GS) pay scale, the pay scale used to determine the salaries of most civilian government employees. (<https://www.federalpay.org/gs/2019/GS-15>)

desk. I liked that because I could still talk aviation and be related to that, rather than just pushing papers around. I had that connection to it. So—

DePue: It's also notorious for long hours many times.

Tyler: Yes, sir, it is. In the winter time, I would leave my house in the dark because the garage was inside, underneath the house or whatever. I would drive to work, park in the underground garage, go up, work all day—I was in a Dilbert cube, no windows—go down to the gym at lunchtime to work out—which was in the basement, so no windows again—back up for the rest of the afternoon, get in my car at night and drive home and never know whether the sun came up or not, all day long.<sup>57</sup> Yeah, long days.

But—and certainly from Washington—if I wanted to listen to any of the inputs or talk to any of the people on the West Coast, I'm three hours ahead of them, so if they call at 2:00 in the afternoon, and I'm already gone at 5:00, I'm not providing them much service. So, you kind of had to play that game a little bit.

DePue: Nav Air stood for?

Tyler: Naval Air Systems Command.

DePue: Where was the family living at that time?

Tyler: We were living in suburbia Washington, known as Montclair, just down the I-95 corridor.

DePue: In Virginia?

Tyler: In Virginia. Just north of Marine Corps Base Quantico. Our son was rowing on the Occoquan River, eights and fours if you're familiar with those long pencil boats and oarsmen with coxswain. He graduated from Potomac High School there.

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<sup>57</sup> Dilbert Cube is a reference to the American comic strip, *Dilbert*, written and illustrated by Scott Adams and known for its satirical office humor, featuring engineer Dilbert, whose work space is an office cubicle. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dilbert>)

DePue: Your son did.

Tyler: Our son did.

DePue: Did the family enjoy the time they spent in the DC area?

Tyler: I think so. Our daughter enjoyed her middle school years. Our son enjoyed his rowing and had some camaraderie there. We did a lot of the tourist things. We spent time out in the Shenandoah. We had a Jeep at the time... No, that was in AWS, but we spent time in the Shenandoah. We spent time in Prince William Forest Park, walking and enjoying the area. So, yeah, I think we had a pretty good time there.



*The family portrait taken in 1987 while Tyler was stationed at Naval Air Systems Command in Washington, D.C. From left to right are Rob, Suzanne, Carol and Lieutenant Colonel Robert Tyler.*

DePue: How long were you in that tour?

Tyler: Four years.

DePue: A longer tour than most you've had, up to this time.

Tyler: Yeah, that was the first one that... Well, the family stayed in California for five years—I took that one-year sabbatical in the middle of it—and then we had four years there, and then we ended up... The family spent the next four years then in North Carolina.

DePue: So, when did you get to North Carolina?

Tyler: What was that? Eighty-seven. Moved the family down, and I went... Or was it eighty-six?

DePue: I've got July eighty-six, before you did our pre-interview.

Tyler: Yeah, July eighty-six would have been right. I went down, and we bought a house down there. I refreshed in the aircraft, and then I went to Okinawa for a year. At that point in time, the policy in the Marine Corps was, when we send you overseas unaccompanied, we will tell you where your next duty assignment is. We had changed that over the years, so that families could then minimize the amount of disruption, and they would know where they were going. So, they could either stay at the last duty station or go to the next duty station in advance. Carol moved the kids down there. Our daughter got into high school down there.

DePue: Down there being Cherry Point?

Tyler: Cherry Point [Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point] in Havelock, North Carolina. She ended up teaching in Annunciation Catholic School down there. Our daughter was in high school, and I ran off to Okinawa for a year, flying once again with 152, but I was assigned to Marine Wing Support Group 17, as we have talked about before, supporting all of our deployed wing support personnel throughout the Pacific Theater.

DePue: And you commanded there?

Tyler: I was the operations officer. I was the executive officer for several months. And when the CO went in-country in Team Spirit. I was CO-Rear of the support group.<sup>58</sup> But that was... He didn't let me have **all** of the control while he was in Korea. (laughs)

DePue: This is the second time you've been to Okinawa. Was the relationship between the local population and the Marines becoming more strained by that time?

Tyler: Yes and no, both because you still had large pockets that really liked us. You still had the politicians, for a variety of reasons, that wanted us off their island. That was more entrenched. You saw a lot more in the paper and in the local media that was translated into something I could see. And we dealt with more of it because every time we had a fender-bender between a six-by—and I'm now responsible for a large portion of the six-bys on the island—

DePue: Six-by being?

Tyler: One of those large, big green trucks that...six wheels, six driving wheels. So, any time I put a refueler on the road, I put anything on there, you had a driver, an assistant driver who was sitting there, trying to make sure you didn't run over somebody on the side that you couldn't see. But any time there was any kind of a fender-bender or incident with a civilian, it just made the press...all sorts of recriminations about why we needed to get these Marines off the base.

DePue: I'm curious. You talked about the first time you're in Okinawa, the whole island was adjusting to driving on the other side of the road.

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: The trucks that your guys were driving, were they configured to drive on—

Tyler: No.

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<sup>58</sup> Team Spirit was a joint military training exercise of United States Forces Korea and the Military of South Korea, held between 1976 and 1993. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Team\\_Spirit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Team_Spirit))

DePue: They were configured for our kind of roads.

Tyler: They were our trucks, and the only thing we might have done was hang bigger mirrors on the other side. That's why you had an assistant driver on that side.

DePue: Yeah, that would make it a lot dicier, I would think.

Tyler: It made it challenging. We had training programs for our drivers. We had all sorts of rules and things we tried to do to try and minimize adverse impact in that area.

DePue: So, you were there in 1986 to June of eighty-seven. What was the job you came back to?

Tyler: I came back to being a squadron commander of VMGRT-253, the best job I had, the whole career.

DePue: VMGRT?

Tyler: VMGRT, Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Training Squadron 253, a brand-new squadron. Wally Miller had had it for a few months ahead of me, getting the hangar in place, taking delivery of the first couple of aircraft, getting some of the people in. He moved over to take over command of VMGR-252.

I picked up 253 and started the serious training program, put together the syllabus and the criteria and trained all of the aviators that were flying C-130s, ran upgrade schools for them, trained all of the maintenance personnel that worked on our airplanes. They'd had their basic training to be an electrician or be a hydraulics man or whatever, and then they would come to us for specific training in C-130s and how they worked. Of course, we took all of the brand-new aviators out of flight school and then introduced them to the C-130 and all of its systems and how it flew and its techniques and everything.

DePue: Essentially this is a school's unit.

Tyler: It is a schoolhouse, yes sir.

DePue: Now the culmination of a lot of people's careers, what Army officers, Marine officers, anybody had been gearing their whole career towards, is the opportunity to get a command.

Tyler: Yep.

DePue: Was this the kind of command that you had dreamed about all those years before?

Tyler: It was a flying command. You betcha. Yeah, to be able to go out and be the airplane that's leading the flight, all the time, and as an aviator, to have a squadron... I think, underlying your question there is, "Gee, would you have liked to have had a tactical squadron instead of the training squadron?"

Yeah, I can see why one might ask that, but in standing up a new unit, knowing that what I was doing is preparing all of these aviators to go to tactical squadrons... At the time, we didn't have any fracas going on. There were no belligerencies going on. All we were doing in our tactical 130 squadrons... We, for the most part, scaled down our trans-packing of aircraft; we had recycled the way we thought about doing that and left airplanes in place, as opposed to moving airplanes back and forth, doing some other more efficient things. The guys would end up supporting folks but not with the same OPTEMPO that we had on the West Coast.<sup>59</sup>

I had dedicated funds; I knew I had flight hours; I had some protected money because I was a training squadron. When other people had issues with budgets and flight hours and those kinds of things, I still had flight hours and money for parts and things. I had good relationships with headquarters when it came to personnel, so I was well staffed. It made for doing things and turning out products that I could show meaningful metrics, that we were doing good stuff. It was enjoyable.

DePue: How many did you command?

Tyler: That's always one of those questions and depending... I think, by table of organization, permanent party, I probably had only about 186 or so permanent people. But then I had maybe thirty to forty pilots, and I had another 100 or so student mechanics and whatever else in there.

DePue: When you say pilots, do you mean student pilots?

Tyler: Student pilots, yeah, in addition to my permanent party pilots.

DePue: I know that we're going to have a picture of you taking command, or is that giving up command?

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<sup>59</sup> The Department of Defense adopted "operations tempo" as a measure of the pace of an operation or operations in terms of equipment usage -- aircraft "flying hours," ship "steaming days" or "tank [driving] miles." In the military way, the term became jargon: optempo. (<https://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=42131>)

Tyler: Taking command, that was taking command.

DePue: What was your feeling, giving that up a couple years later?

Tyler: I did real well until in the receiving line after giving it up. Two years plus, a little bit more than two years of having command, you hate to give it up, but you know it's time for somebody else to come in. My relief, Mark Robbins, was a good guy. He flew well. I thought he would do a good job with the squadron and everything. That always helps a little bit. But I did real well in the receiving line, until I got down to my crusty old sergeant major who's saying good-bye to me, and he's got tears in his eyes. That just tore me up, when that crusty old sergeant major's saying, "I'm going to miss you, Colonel." just tears in his eyes. It's a sad moment



*Lieutenant Colonel Robert Tyler assumes command of VMGRT-253 (KC-130 Training Squadron) from LTC Wallace Miller in July 1987, while at Marine Corps Air Station at Cherry Point, North Carolina.*

But I looked at it, and I looked at the stats and the metrics we talked about...the wrong metrics in Vietnam of what was there. It's really easy in aviation units to take how many hours you flew. Hours in the air don't mean anything if you're not doing something with them. My Ops O and I worked out metrics that we could give on how many training Xs we'd get per flight hour and what the elements of those training Xs were, how many landings you got, how many approaches you got, how many things that went into that student's memory bank and experience bank for each of those flight hours and how many hours to train and the product we could deliver. We could measure all that.



*A flight of KC-130 Hercules refuelers from VMGRT-253 conducting formation training somewhere over North Carolina in 1988 when Lieutenant Colonel Tyler commanded the squadron, call sign Titans.*

I had the oldest aircraft in the fleet, and yet we managed to have the highest readiness rate of any



of the C-130 squadrons and two years accident free in doing training, where you've got a little bit higher risk because you've got complacent instructors and novice pilots at the other side. You get both of those combinations, sometimes you can come close. We had a couple of come-closes, but we didn't have any bad things that happened. So, you look at it, and yeah, it felt good, but it felt—

Then the other thing that we talked about, the day I gave up the flag is the last time that I was focused on the squadron flight schedule. We had talked about that earlier. In an aviator's career... For me that was twenty-some years coming, by the time I gave up the squadron. I was already at the twenty-one-year mark at that point in time.

DePue: Lieutenant colonel?

Tyler: Yeah, lieutenant colonel with twenty-one years, giving up the squadron. I could have retired—that's what Wally did—but I didn't, when I gave up the squadron. Until that day, every day of your career had been focused on getting on the flight schedule—Can you support that flight schedule? What is the flight schedule?—to some extent. Now, giving up the flag, as much as I could beg or grovel or whatever else, I wasn't going to be routinely on somebody's flight schedule.

My job now was being able to provide venues because I went up to the Wing Operation Center in their G-3 and was a war fighting branch officer.<sup>60</sup> What I was responsible for now was putting together scenarios and exercises and whatever else that would exercise all the aviators of the wing for the wing to support larger operations. I was now looking not at how do I fly or how do you fly or how does anybody else fly, but rather how do we take these forces and do what we're supposed to do with them? More importantly, how do I train them to be able to do that? So my focus now has changed significantly, from being a guy kicking rudders and yanking and banking. I'm no longer a plumber; I'm not playing with the pipes. I'm the "they" that nobody likes. (DePue laughs)

DePue: As the commander of a training squadron, I would think that you really wouldn't have too many opportunities to be getting cockpit time yourself. Or did you avail yourself to have that opportunity?

Tyler: No. All of us were instructor pilots. I basically flew every check ride, or almost every check ride, for the co-piloted check rides. I wouldn't say I flew all of them. We only had three or four... Certain ones of us were just instructors, and then certain ones of us for quality control were what were

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<sup>60</sup> A Wing Operations Center (WOC) consists of numerous agencies and squadrons to serve as a center point during major operational events. (<https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5511826/341st-missile-wing-updates-wing-operations-center>)

known as the NATOPS [Naval Air Training and Operations Procedures Standardization] instructors, the check pilots.

I would be one of them that would fly the check rides for our instructors. I would fly several. I said almost all, but I think that's an exaggeration, probably a good 30 to 40 percent of the co-pilot check rides [that] would come through, I would fly. Between all of the instructor pilots, we tried to keep our flight hours about the same. I didn't want any of my lieutenants saying the old man's a flight time hog and taking all the flight time. Nor did I want to become rusty in what I was doing because my ability to command was also tied... I had to have good airmanship skills.

DePue: You already talked briefly about the next assignment but tell us a little bit more about that one.

Tyler: That was the job, like I said, that was to be able to teach the whole wing how to fight. We had to look at air defenses and how do we... We had, all up and down the East Coast, the Mid-Atlantic, electronic warfare range that we produce emitters and stimulators and whatever else that would emulate a...at the time, a Russian anti-aircraft, anti-defense system.

One of the things I did there is we did a major exercise that we started using both Russian and American air defense systems to fly against them because I said, "We're looking at parts of the world now where these guys have old Russian systems, and we've sold them stuff, and now they don't like us anymore." Iran was a classic case. They're lighting us up with our own stuff that we sold them. So, we're going to have to be able to fly against that. So we sat down, and we worked out a way to do that kind of training.

The other thing I spent my time with was in the Air Ops Center, the Tactical Air Ops Centers.<sup>61</sup> The typical green tent, only it's a pneumatic tent now with all the computers and the grease boards with the guys writing backwards on it and keep track of all the forces and everything else. But I ran exercises and created exercises for the battle staff to be able to teach all the colonels that run their groups and all the staff officers how they would fight it. My biggest thing was getting a general to get in because if I could get the general to come down and sit in there, then I've got somebody other than the second string to be training on how to do their—

DePue: You mean the rest of the officers would understand this was an important thing to do.

Tyler: That's right. If I could get General Gus [William Gus Pagonis] in there, then the colonels would show up. If I couldn't get the general in there, then I just

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<sup>61</sup> The Tactical Air Operations Center (TAOC) is the Marine air command and control system's (MACCS's) principal airspace control and management agency. (<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/systems/taoc.htm>)

ended up with captains and majors. I really wanted the lieutenant colonels and colonels in there learning how to do the job.

DePue: Was this still at Cherry Point?

Tyler: Still at Cherry Point for one year.

DePue: And this job started in what timeframe?

Tyler: It started right after I gave up the squadron.

DePue: Was that August of eighty-nine?

Tyler: That's August of... What's it say up there, eighty-nine? Is that right?

DePue: I think it's eighty-nine. We're looking at the picture of your squadron, in front of a KC-130, I assume.

Tyler: It is, indeed.

DePue: This is the timeframe now when things are happening in the world that probably a decade before you could never have imagined. I think it's in 1989 that the Berlin Wall comes down.

Tyler: Um-hmm, I think it was. That's a good thing. The Marines were focused on the Pacific, so we're not as tied to Germany and the Berlin Wall as certainly Army units were.

DePue: But you just explained that much of what you were doing was geared towards Soviet weapons systems.

Tyler: Yeah, because the Soviet surrogates throughout the Middle East and other places, as part of the Cold War, we were constantly up against them. Now with the demise of the Soviet Union and the change in all that, that turned loose a lot of these little gangsters that were held under the thumb of the Russian Bear to say, "Hey, we want to do things our way, and we're going to punch you in the nose, or at least we're going to kick you in the shins." We saw a lot of that, that started to show up in little places around the world, that you started to see and, of course, as evidenced one year later, when Saddam Hussein went stupid and ran into Kuwait.<sup>62</sup>

DePue: But before that time, as I recall, there was a lot of, "Well, who's our enemy now?" kinds of questions.

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<sup>62</sup> Saddam Hussein al-Tikriti, (1937- 2006) was president of Iraq (1979–2003) His brutal rule was marked by costly and unsuccessful wars against neighboring countries. (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saddam-Hussein>)

Tyler: Yeah, and certainly the Marine Corps was going through, at that time, re-asserting its role as soldiers of the sea, force projection from the sea, expeditionary warriors, small. The nation can send in the Marine Corps without going to war. The nation can't send in the Army without going to war because it's the nation's Army.

DePue: So that was the fight to stay relevant when President Bush was talking about things like a peace dividend, which translates into a downsizing of the force.

Tyler: Yeah, and so we looked at maneuver warfare. We were dusting off counter-insurgency ops. We were looking at all those coming back to our Marine Corps roots of a small, expeditionary force that can go in and take care of embassies, take care of little things somewhere, stabilize the situation or show of force, whatever to resolve a minor situation and keep it from getting out of hand.

DePue: Let's move to July of 1990. I believe that's when you got your promotion to colonel.

Tyler: I got selected a little bit before that. Didn't get actually promoted until I was at Headquarters Marine Corps. But I got selected in the springtime. The news came out that I was among the lucky 10 percenters or whatever the percentage was that year. That was a good day. I've often times talked, the day I pinned those eagles on, there were only what, 400 or so total people in the entire Marine Corps senior to me. That puts you into that .01 of 1 of one percent of the Marine Corps posture.

DePue: Now, here's an opportunity for you to be honest with yourself and with us as well. At that point in your career, were you dreaming of the possibility of getting stars down the road?

Tyler: Never thought about being a general. Colonel, I thought, was doable. In my classmates at Air Command and Staff College are three three-star generals amongst those of us who were there. The guy that retired me and one of my classmates were at Nav Air together at the same time, so I was running in a circle of folks that, umm, might happen. But at that point in time, I was just looking at the next job as a colonel and feeling really, really good that I had that chicken on the front sticker of my car.

DePue: What was the job that you went to as a full colonel?

Tyler: I was assigned at Headquarters Marine Corps, and I became the director of aviation safety and analysis, the director of ASA. That's a position where I got to look at all of the safety posture of Marine aviation. In that position, you got to analyze... I'm the first person in the chain of command that gets to see, at the same time, both the accident investigation, that's a privilege document, and the public Judge Advocate General investigation of any military mishap

and justify or rectify the differences between the two of them and see what action needs to be taken. That was an interesting job.

One of the things to be said, when Saddam Hussein went stupid, two days after, we checked out of Cherry Point. Both of us, Carol and I, were a little disappointed that we weren't at Cherry Point, in charge of a squadron or something because, at that point in time, very few of the wives—in fact none of the wives that were at Cherry Point at that point in time—had ever had a husband flying in combat. So, how do the wives back home deal with that? Carol thought that she should be part of helping those folks figure that out.

As you and I had talked about my first experience in getting shot at, I did stupid things, like look to see where the fire was coming from, to be able to have that experience helping people understand what they're going to go through the first time they end up in combat and everything else.

From my position then in ASA, I saw that we were doing the same stupid things we do at the beginning of any fracas. We started flying lower and faster and crashing more airplanes, avoiding suspected enemy fire, or practicing to avoid suspected enemy fire, than we had shot down, a three-to-one ratio.

DePue: A three-to-one ratio of accidents, versus lost to combat?

Tyler: Combat loss. So, you sit there and say, "Why is that?" That started my thinking along that, which later on, jumping to the next command that I was in, got me to where I did my doctorate because I wanted to look at why people did those stupid things that I observed while I was in that position at headquarters in ASA.

I was also in that position after Desert Storm kicked off.<sup>63</sup> I became the deputy commandant for aviation's executive officer for probably about seven, eight months. Then I sat down and was his...euphemistically called his gatekeeper. I controlled what papers went in. One of the guys in our MOAA [Military Officer Association of America] chapter indicated that that was a... The EA drops the breadcrumbs for where the general's going to go that day and what he's going to do. I was the guy that would go down and pick up the morning briefing, the classified briefing that had to be hand carried. So, I got the first look at it and tagged the things that the general would be interested in and he should really focus on.

I was there during part of that Tailhook fiasco on the West Coast, and we had Marine aviators in that. So, I managed to be in the secretary of the

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<sup>63</sup> Operation Desert Storm, popularly known as the first Gulf War, was the successful U.S.-Allied response to Iraq's attempt to overwhelm neighboring Kuwait. (<https://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1193.html>)

Navy's office with General [Craig D.] Wills when we went over and talked about how we were going to handle those situations.

DePue: For the person who is going to read this or listen to this fifty years from now, they might know about Desert Storm, but they might be thrown by Tailhook. Tell us a little bit about what that is.

Tyler: I'm sorry. Tailhook is an association of naval aviators that have gone aboard a carrier. Of course, carrier aviation has tail hooks on their airplanes that they trap when they come aboard the carrier. That's how they stop. So, any of us that have gone and care-qualified in tactical jets are tailhookers. And there's an association out there, like the Association of Army Artillery Officers or Army Cavalry or the 101st Airborne Association, or whatever, that gets together and have reunions and talk about the good old days and get briefings on what's going to happen in naval aviation down the way, and vendors come in and try and sell different things.

Well there was this tailhook convention in San Diego that some of the party rooms got out of hand. There were much muchness over alcohol, which caused some other unseemly behavior with dancing girls and comments and whatever else. And some of that hit the local press, got picked up, and congressmen thought that was inappropriate behavior and investigations followed. Several people were prevented from getting promoted and whatever else because of un-officer-like conduct, as society had changed on what was acceptable behavior at rowdy parties. Was that a politically correct way of saying what Tailhook was all about? (DePue laughs)

DePue: Well, it's a carefully phrased way of saying it. And mind you, this is a group of people who do one of the dangerous things that anybody in the American military is expected to do, I suspect.

Tyler: I have a colleague friend who was a navy psychologist. He talked about the different personalities. You kind of got into that in the different squadrons and what they are. He likened the characterization, as you'd go along, to you can tell the quality of a C-130 party by the vintage of the wine served. You can tell the quality of a party of attack pilots by the size of the bar bill. You can tell the quality of a party of a fighter squadron by the size of the bill to fix the bar afterwards. (laughs) He looks at that.

When you stop and think about fighter pilots and carrier pilots who go out and land on that postage stamp in the middle of the ocean in the night, in rain, in heaving seas and whatever else, they have to know in their own mind that they can do anything because, if they had any doubts, they wouldn't be out there. That creates a certain amount of bravado. But at the same time, it should stimulate—and I'm speaking as a senior officer now—it should stimulate a higher level of self-discipline.

That's what broke down in Tailhook. That's what some in the naval service didn't understand in Tailhook, is that you just can't go on being rowdy boys. You really are expected to display that self-discipline that comes with the responsibility of flying multi-million-dollar aircraft.

DePue: For some reason I'm sitting here listening to this explanation, and I'm thinking of the movie *Top Gun*.

Tyler: Oh yes, oh yes. (both laughs)

DePue: Which kind of captures much of that personality we're talking about I think.

Tyler: Yes.

DePue: You talked about Desert Storm. Was there part of you that was disappointed about not having the opportunity to go to the sandbox?

Tyler: Oh, yes.

DePue: And part of you that was relieved?

Tyler: (sighs) Nobody likes to get shot at, not really, but I would've liked to have gone. I would've liked to have had the experience of commanding a unit deployed over there. I think I could have done good things because I had the past experience and whatever else. So, yeah, I was disappointed. Marines tend to run towards the cordite. Yeah, I wanted to go.

But the closest I got was being a senior watch officer back at the command post at Headquarters Marine Corps during part of that, to include the operation in Somalia, when that kicked off over in the middle of the other stuff. In that job we were pushing information forward and receiving information, but we weren't querying. The commandant was very adamant that we would not ask commanders in the field for data because the last thing they needed was us looking over their shoulder. Instead, it was, we were there to support them. If they needed anything, they called us, with the exception of looking for one particular corporal who was a cousin of a Somali whatever—we needed to get him in as a translator and whatever—we did not push things forward.

DePue: We talked extensively about your views about the Vietnam War, the way that was prosecuted, the way that ended. What were your views about the way Desert Storm was prosecuted?

Tyler: Desert Storm was militarily brilliant and very well executed. The Marines had an amphibious force set off, and we had a good enough disinformation campaign that Saddam Hussein was convinced we were going to come across the beach. Then he tied up whole bunches of forces on that southern border

because he was convinced there was going to be a major amphibious assault. That allowed then the other people to go around very rapidly—

DePue: You mean the Army.

Tyler: The Army...to be very successful in their march across the desert in a very rapid pace. We sat at headquarters a little bit, talking to other people, “What are we going to do when we win? What are we going to do when we get to whatever?” Nobody knew. That had not been...kind of, in Colin Powell’s words, “We bought it. Now what are we going to do with it?”<sup>64</sup>

DePue: Are you talking about as an occupation force basically? Was that the concern?

Tyler: At that time Desert Storm, of course, got us through Kuwait and got that done. I’m kind of mixing that up a little bit with then what we did in going into Iraq, when we actually went up and—

DePue: You’re talking about 2003 versus ninety-one.

Tyler: Yeah, versus ninety-one. Ninety-one did a good thing, got it done. You got them in place and held them down. We knew, “Yeah, that worked.” And it worked very efficiently. I think the worst part of it was it was almost too sterile. We didn’t have high casualties. We didn’t have all that stuff, and we’ve gotten used to being able to do big things on the battlefield, without any losses.

DePue: The decision at the end of that...this is President Bush’s decision—

Tyler: To not go north.

DePue: To not go north, to allow Saddam Hussein to stay in position. For you and the other colleagues that you’re working with, living with every day, was that a wise choice?

Tyler: At the time it was probably the prudent thing.

DePue: Prudent? That’s the term that the president always used. (Tyler laughs)

Tyler: Well, I guess I must have heard that because we didn’t have... One doesn’t want to invade the seat of what’s viewed by many people as the seat of civilization in that part of the world. We ended up having to do that, it appears in 2003, for a variety of reasons. But at the time, what we had put a coalition together to do was to kick an aggressor out of a neighboring country, at the request of that other country. That was the mission, and that’s what we did.

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<sup>64</sup> General Colin Powell was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in early August 1990 when Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein ordered his army to invade Kuwait. (<https://www.moaa.org/Content/Publications-and-Media/Features-and-Columns/MOAA-Features/Colin-Powell-Remembers-Desert-Storm-25-years-later>)



Had we gone to Baghdad at that time, having stated that was our purpose, I think we would have probably inflamed anti-American sentiments throughout the region because now we were really going in and taking on one of our brethren, as far as the Arab states would have thought.

DePue: Were you surprised by the American public's reaction to the war and their treatment of the returning soldiers, airmen and Marines?

Tyler: I wouldn't say I was surprised...in what regard?

DePue: I guess the question is, these veterans who are returning from the war were treated quite differently from when you and your colleagues were coming back from Vietnam.

Tyler: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Not surprised necessarily, but that became an interesting observation in the nineties. More recently in the long War on Terrorism, I'm finding that level to still be intriguing, to watch how it's changed and how we see people in airports applaud soldiers walking through in their BDUs [Battle Dress Uniforms] and whatever else. I'm intrigued that that changed. We didn't even see...other than units when they marched down after VE Day or VJ Day or whatever, you saw big displays of public affection after World War II, but you didn't see it at the individual level that you're seeing now in airports and different places. At least I didn't hear that being reported after World War II.

DePue: Now you've got the PhD in sociology, is that correct?

Tyler: Psychology.

DePue: Psychology.

Tyler: Cognitive psych. I'm not a clinician, thank you.

DePue: You keep saying you're intrigued. How do you understand that dynamic?

Tyler: Yeah. You're putting me on a spot on that one. I've got to think about that. I think somewhere in there, because we have so few people who have served in uniform in the country, total population, even fewer in Congress than has been historically whatever out there. The press somehow or another has gotten a little more behind our military. We like them, and we like to do things for them. I see in that process—

Since Vietnam, we have seen our military and our deployed force characterized a little bit as victims, that they have been victimized because they've been sent to war. They're separated from their family. They've had the horrors of war. We certainly saw the characterization during Vietnam and after, that our veterans were druggies and disturbed. We're seeing in the media and everything that everybody's coming back, because they've had all

this terrible stuff that they dealt with overseas, in the sandbox and the arduous conditions and everything else, that they're suffering from PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], et cetera.

I think there's this outpouring of, "We have to do something." I think it may be a little bit of, we feel collective guilt from Vietnam and/or the Vietnam veterans that are sitting out there as well saying, "I don't want those people that are coming back now to feel like I did when I came back. We've got to do something more for them."

I think all that comes together to say, "We have to do something." Plus, you've got several decades now of public awareness in schools, teaching that schools have to have a civic action program, some activity. So our children now, for the past ten years, have been sending postcards and letters and care packages from their schools as school projects to our deployed soldiers. All of that comes together to say, "Okay, we'll applaud you and all that sort of stuff."

I think most of the soldiers coming back kind of look at it—those that I've talked to—they're a little embarrassed and going, "I went over and did my job. What's the big deal?" I don't know. I'm rambling because I'm still assessing it, I think, as anything else.

DePue: Let's go back to the 1990s in your career. What's the next posting for you?

Tyler: Nineteen nineties, I spent three years up there at Headquarters Marine Corps, and then I went down to what we call a twilight tour, which is the last tour on active duty, and took over as what would now be known as the program manager for training systems. I was responsible for the full lifecycle support of all the Marine Corps training systems. That's all the training devices, the simulators, the live fire simulators, the board game simulators, the virtual simulators, the full motion simulators, the tank gunnery trainers, all that sort of stuff for their development, the ed specs getting into them, the engineering of them, and then the fielding of them, the acquisition fielding and maintenance of them in the field and upgrading them forever.

DePue: Just for the aviation community?

Tyler: No, for all of them, everything from a nine-millimeter small arms trainer, an M-16 trainer, a tank gunnery trainer. In fact, one of the success stories down there that we used often times was—

DePue: Where's down there?

Tyler: In Orlando, Florida, and the command was the Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division that we were a part of at that point in time. We took a reserve unit and put them with appended trainers, little devices that stuck over their viewpoints on their tank. The tank's sitting in a well deck of a

navy ship going to Desert Storm. These guys are getting, on the ship, their full training through Table 11 of their training routine on how to fire their tank gun as they're going to sea. So, they were fully qualified by the time they got in-theatre. And we did it all in virtual reality, onboard the ship. That's what I did while I was there.

When I first got there, my deputy kept beating up on me, "Colonel, you really need to go over to the school," because our center was on a research park adjacent to the University of Central Florida. He says, "You need to go back to school and get this great degree in Human Factor Psychology." I said, "Nah, nah, Charlie. I've got enough school. I'm an old man. I don't need this."

Next thing I know, I'm in the middle of doing a doctorate program in cognitive psychology, and it worked really well because I could... The center that I worked in had education specialists, other psychologists, people that know training theory, et cetera. I could use the information I'm getting in the classroom to talk to these scientists in our building. And I could use, as case studies in my classroom, actual training that we're doing in the field and improve the training in the field, based on current, latest thinking coming out of...and theory on all this sort of stuff. The symbiotic relationship of that whole process was wonderful.



*Robert Tyler received his Ph.D. in applied psychology from the University of Central Florida in 1997 during his last active duty assignment in the Marine Corps.*

I had a great gatekeeper who I could come in in the morning, get all my minions in the office doing their thing, and close the door and say, "I'm going to do my Superman act," get out of my peanut butter and pickle suit and get into my glad rags, drive over the three blocks to campus, park in the faculty parking because I had faculty parking privileges, go into class, do my thing. My gatekeeper would say, "The Colonel's gone for a couple of hours. He's in a meeting. He'll be back." I would come back, close the door, do my Superman act, get back in my peanut butter and pickle suit, and carry on with the rest of the day and then go home and study at night. It worked well.

DePue: You've got to explain a couple of things here, "peanut butter and pickle suit" and then "glad rags." (Tyler laughs)

Tyler: Peanut butter and pickle suit. Marine summertime uniform, which we wore most of the time in Orlando, Florida, because of the temperature, is kind of a brown shirt, short sleeved shirt, and green trousers.

DePue: A khaki—

Tyler: Kind of a khaki shirt. It looks about the color of peanut butter, and the trousers look like pickles, so peanut butter and pickle suit. Glad rags are just those civilian rags, your civilian clothes that you wear when you're just—

DePue: Like we're wearing right now?

Tyler: Like we're wearing right now. I'm in glad rags.

DePue: (laughs) I kind of knew that's what it was, but I wanted to hear your explanation. You said... And I think you started this tour July of 1993. Does that sound right?

Tyler: That sounds right.

DePue: You said that this was your twilight tour. That's self-explanatory. In July of 1993, did you see this as your twilight tour?

Tyler: Logically, I knew it probably was. I can tell you why for three reasons. I did not take on the persona of it being my last tour. I was there to do a job, and I was not a retired-on-active-duty guy that was there just putting in his time, waiting to go to work for some civilians out there. I knew, at that point in time, that my chances for a star—as a colonel, you're going to look to the next rank—I knew they were, at the most, very minimal.

The Marine Corps, as all the services do, promotes to general on best suited, at the time, of what's necessary. I knew going in...I said two of my classmates and the guy that retired me had been in Nav Air at the same time I was. They ended up getting a joint tour designation out of that tour that I did not. Don't know why.

DePue: So that would be a ticket that should be punched if you wanted to get a star?

Tyler: It's a legislative requirement, congressional mandate, that you have to have a joint tour before you can make general or flag rank in the services.

DePue: And a joint tour would mean that they served on a staff or in a position where they were working with other services?

Tyler: Other services. One of them was the Harrier [a jet powered attack aircraft] class-desk. The only service that had the Harrier was the Marine Corps, but that was a joint tour. Don't understand that. The other one was a class-desk for the F-18. The only guys that fly the F-18 are the Navy and Marine Corps. His

was a joint tour. I'm in a C-130, working with Air Force AF-Pros [Air Force Program Offices] and the Coast Guard and the Navy, and mine wasn't a joint tour. Don't understand it. It didn't happen. Okay, fine.

At the time, my command in Orlando was not a command billet. It has since been turned into one, at my urging to the commandant and the staff. So, I did not have an O-6 level command. I had done the senior level school by correspondence. Right after I did that, they started saying that flag rank officers needed to have that school in residency.

DePue: The equivalent of the Army War College.

Tyler: The Army War College, ICAF, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, those kinds of schools. I did ICAF by correspondence. So, three statutory requirements I had not met.

So, I kind of knew it wasn't going to happen at that point in time, as I'm sitting down there in Orlando. Further, there was a big brouhaha going on about the academies. Are the academies producing the leaders we need? If they are, then we should be seeing more and more of our flag rank officers coming out of the academies. My two classmates that made general, both are ring knockers. They went to the academy. So, hey!

DePue: To the Naval Academy.

Tyler: To the Naval Academy. So, when I look at all of that, I understand that what the Marine Corps needed for all sorts of reasons were these guys doing their thing for the Marine Corps. Would I have liked to have had a star and a flag in my office that has red with a big gold star on it? Yeah, we all would. Would it have changed the work I did after I got out of the Marine Corps a lot? Yeah, it would have changed a lot. Would I be sitting here talking to you in Decatur? Probably not. So, when I stop and think about college dropout, the PhD and private to colonel, I can't complain. I had a great career.

DePue: So, no regrets or resentment about that?

Tyler: No regrets, not at all. I wouldn't have wanted to do some of the jobs that some of those... One-star generals get really crappy jobs. They're the new kid on the block. They get sent all the places that two and three-stars don't want to go. Who wants that? (both laugh) I sat up there and watched where I sent them because I was working for the three-star, and we kept sending the one-star to all these other meetings that the boss didn't want to go to. I don't want to go there either. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Let's fast forward to the end of your career. What led to the decision to actually retire?

Tyler: The monitor once again called up and said, "Bob, you're a mover." I said, "What do you mean by that?" He says, "Well, you've got a ripe overseas control date. We need you to go to Okinawa again." I says, "Is this accompanied? Have you got a command for me?" He says, "No, no command, just unaccompanied for a year." I said, "Let me get this straight, you want me to go to Okinawa for a year to count tent pins when I've got a doctorate in the discipline here that's working for simulators and training and everything else. And you want me to go over there and leave my wife again at thirty plus years." And he says, "Well yeah, you're a mover. You got to go."

I said, "How would you like my letter? Does this telephone call suffice? Do you want it in e-mail or snail mail?" He says, "This'll work." And I says, "Fine, thank you very much." All I did was then select the date at the end of ninety-seven and retired.

DePue: It sounds like he wasn't surprised by your decision.

Tyler: No, he wasn't. Rusty and I have been friends for a long time, and he understood.

DePue: And as a mover, you're talking about... This was the assignments officer back in DC.

Tyler: This was the colonel assignments officer and that I was a mover, meaning that my overseas control date was long enough, because it had been ten years and it was time for me to deploy, unaccompanied again, somewhere to go fill out a staff. I could have stayed on active duty for more years, but that would have meant another overseas tour. It was time. At thirty years, there was nothing to be gained for that.

DePue: It sounds like you were able to make that decision without even going home and talking to Carol about it.

Tyler: Yeah, that was an easy one.

DePue: Had you guys talked about it already, about what was next?

Tyler: We kind of had because I was looking at... With a doctorate, what were we going to do? We'd already put out some feelers to different colleges that had flight schools and who were looking for deans to the school of aviation and that sort of stuff. I was already testing what did I want to do because I did not want to become a typical revolving, five-year shelf life, retired colonel, just as a beltway bandit or a parkway patriot or otherwise known as a consultant to the Department of Defense kind of guy. So, we were looking at striking out and dusting off this new doctorate.

DePue: In what timeframe did you retire?

Tyler: December 31, 1997.

DePue: Can you very briefly discuss what's happened between 1997 to this time?

Tyler: I started out in what was reported to be one of the best jobs I could have had. I was the chief administrator of the National Aviation and Transportation Center of Dowling College, looking at intermodal transportation. I had my own flight school. I had my own simulator facility, and we were looking at intermodal transportation, particularly as it related to Long Island and New York and whatever.

DePue: Where was this?

Tyler: Dowling College, Oakdale, New York on Long Island. What I didn't understand was I was on soft money. That is to say, I was on Senator [Alfonse] D'Amato's pork barrel money. And when the good citizens of New York decided to disinvite him to return to Capitol Hill, I had no funding, and I had no job. So, one year, or shortly just less than a year into that job, I found myself on Long Island with no network, no friend and no job. And the lease on our house was running out.

We moved back to the northern Virginia area, where I figured an old Marine colonel with a PhD could get some sort of a beltway bandito job. I ended up spending the next few years working as a human factors consultant for the Federal Aviation Administration, doing some primary research on the next generation cockpit displays and next generation air traffic controller displays, fascinating work.

[I] took a position then with another company that also included some primary research in Bethel, Alaska, which is a place I had never decided I wanted to go, up there looking at mud flats and going on the other side of the air defense identification zone, on the Russian side of that, at some fishing villages, putzing around out there, looking at how people fly those single engine airplanes way out there.

[I] took a job then working for somebody who was supporting various Department of Defense training devices and simulators and stuff. Was a division director of that company and was providing contractor support in the development of some of the training devices I was putting together in Orlando, Florida. So, we were supporting the Orlando office. I was the division director out of Washington, DC area for people I had on site in Orlando, working on Marine programs and some training stuff.

Did that for a couple of years and then picked a position up with a different company, looking at the effectiveness of network-centric warfare for different units. I had the privilege of doing a case study on that little SEAL Team Six that everybody now has heard about, before people had heard about

it.<sup>65</sup> Looked at their effectiveness and how well they used the technology that the Department of Defense was promoting as more efficient combat effectiveness because of communication and common operating pictures and all that sort of stuff. We did case studies on SEAL Team Six, on a Stryker Brigade in the army, on a Marine Corps Unit.

The one I can talk about was Singapore and how the city-state of Singapore dealt with the SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome] epidemic.<sup>66</sup> One of the things that came out in all these case studies, but was really evident in the Singapore one, is that the technology is a tool that helps people who have already established relationships maintain contact when they're in disparate—not desperate, but disparate—locations. But if they didn't have that individual connectivity before—the personal touch—that they had difficulty establishing it just with the technology. We saw the effectiveness of Seal Team Six. Singapore really brought that out. Then we saw how it didn't work with the Stryker Brigade and some of the other units.<sup>67</sup>

From there I ended up doing some work with the Naval Research Lab and some DARPA stuff, Defense Advanced Research Programs Agency, looking at modeling human behavior. That came around two different things. When you start to look at how somebody will react to **your** impact on them in one way or another. For instance, if you were to threaten to do something to my son, I'm probably going to be hostile towards you. However, when he was sixteen, there were some days I'd probably pay you to do him in. (DePue laughs) How do I model that? How do I help decision makers see that? I spent time with that, working inside sequestered offices behind gates and behind all that sort of stuff, where you leave your cell phone with the guard out front, so you can't take pictures and talk or do anything else, looking at the national threat models and looking at those.

One of the questions that was asked was, “What kind of ship do I buy? And how do I model that?” If I buy something like a sub-tender that can go in for a natural disaster and rebuild a port, people like us. If I put a helicopter aircraft carrier in that has a battalion of Marines and a bunch of helicopters, provide support and do all that sort of stuff, hey, the populous loves that.

How long do I leave them there? If I leave them there more than so many days, so many weeks, so many months, whatever that window is, it

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<sup>65</sup> SEAL Team Six became the U.S. Navy's premier hostage rescue and counter-terrorist unit. It has been compared to the U.S. Army's elite Delta Force. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SEAL\\_Team\\_Six](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SEAL_Team_Six))

<sup>66</sup> In November 2002, a form of atypical pneumonia called severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) began spreading rapidly around the world, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the ailment “a worldwide health threat.” (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK92479/>).

<sup>67</sup> The Stryker Brigade Combat Team is an infantry-centric unit with 3,600 soldiers that combines many of the best characteristics of the current Army forces and exploits technology to fill a current operations capability gap between the Army's heavy and light forces. ([https://www.usarpac.army.mil/docs/Whatis\\_SBCT.pdf](https://www.usarpac.army.mil/docs/Whatis_SBCT.pdf))



starts to say that the local government can't support. So they become an irritant, kind of like on Okinawa. How long are you there before you're an irritant? So I sail them away. How often do I sail them back? All that gets to what's our force laydown structure and that?

I spent time with that, and I actually think I did some of my most interesting and most impactful work after I got out of the Marine Corps in areas that set up policy on what we acquire and what we don't acquire. In how we use simulation. Most recently, I was doing policy plans and policies for the Department of the Navy on how to use simulation for training, for decision making at the highest levels of the Department of Defense. It's looking at... The work I did for DARPA, down at Joint Forces Command in a couple of large exercises, looked at how you could get a battle staff to consider the wicked problems that we have out there, meaning that there's no good solution, that the solutions are a matter of... The least egregious solution is the one you go for. And how do you model that?

To a battle staff, of the ones that we had in the exercise down there, they all came around and said, "The simulation and the decision support tools did not make the decision for me, but it changed what I thought about. It changed all the things I was thinking about because I wasn't thinking about some of these other things and how, if you push the balloon on this side, something bulges over here and how some of the well-intentioned things that we would do actually mess up and have unintended consequences." Question?

DePue: I wanted to ask, after doing all these very interesting things that you obviously got excited about and are passionate about, how did you end up coming to Decatur, Illinois?

Tyler: It's called the beltway, and it's called the traffic, and it's called we're sitting in the beltway doing good jobs and looking at each other saying, "There's a lot of traffic. I can have a more genteel lifestyle." At the time, I could still telecommute and do some of that same consulting from here, back to DC. For the first three years that we moved back here, I was doing that. I was consulting a couple of days a week with the Department of the Navy, the Department of Homeland Security, and some Department of Defense stuff.

Unfortunately, the small business that I was part of at the time and the way the Department of Defense and the Department of the Navy in particular executed sequestration, our company went out of business, after no funding for well over a year. (laughs) So I'm no longer doing that consulting from here.

We came here because my wife has family in the area. Both of us grew up, as we talked about, over in Edgar County. My mother was over there. My brother's over there; her sister's over there, and we moved my mother to Decatur. As part of being back to family and around family, we came back to

Illinois. We looked at Decatur because it's kind of in the center of the state, kind of in the center of the country. The Marine Corps stationed me on both coasts; I've been up and down the coasts and back and forth across them.

We're having a ball, just rediscovering our heritage and taking weekend trips or a couple of day trips out around and seeing parts of this country that we flew over or drove through, and getting to appreciate, in the middle of the heartland, real people doing real work, as opposed to the people inside the beltway (DePue laughs) who create a lot of self-serving hot air. I didn't say that, did I?

DePue: I think you did. (Tyler laughs) I want you to just give me your gut reaction, your memories about 9/11.

Tyler: That's easy. [On] 9/11, I was working for the FAA, and I was working in L'Enfant Plaza, or right down the street from L'Enfant Plaza, as a contractor on site in the Department of Transportation's building, there in the center of Washington, DC. I had come to work that morning, and I had ridden the Metro to work, the Metro being the light rail system in Washington, DC. I was at work. We had an off-site scheduled that day, to go over new requirements from HR [Human Resources] that we had to attend to. We had all gathered on the Metro and drove out to the other end of the Orange Line, to a place in Maryland. We were at a meeting in a Holiday Inn there, for this meeting.

As I'm leaving, somebody said... They had the TV on, and they said, "An airplane, a small airplane, has just flown into one of the twin towers." Wow, that's unusual. Must have gotten lost going down the corridor. When I get off the Metro, at the other end, I'm looking at the second... Two towers are both burning, and we've got all this stuff going on. Remember, we were doing direct support to the FAA and its agencies, and I was at the time working on air traffic controllers and how their displays and their stuff works. So, we had FAA badges. We were part of that whole system.

We're looking at it, and we're saying, "Okay, well." So, we did some of the training that was required to be done because we had all of us there. Then we just kind of sat around for a while because they shut down DC. They evacuated the city. We're going, "Okay, this is interesting."

At some point in time, they've got to start the Metro back up again. I got on the train, drove back into town, or rode back into town. [It was] eerie to be on the train at 1:30 in the afternoon and be the only person in a train car going back into the city. Get into the city, and I get off at L'Enfant Plaza. I walk upstairs and walk across to where our office was, to pick up my...because I had to get my briefcase, keys to the house and keys to my car and all that sort of stuff.

The fire station that was right across the street from where our office was is the primary fire station for the White House anytime the helicopter flies in and out of the Pentagon. The police station there is the command post for disaster response, whatever, in DC. I could not walk down my street without showing my badge where I was going because it was already sequestered off, cop cars, everything all around. [I] get up to my building, grab my stuff and go back out. Get on and come back home.

I'm on, once again, an empty train, going all the way home. Part of the problem in getting home was the station at the Pentagon was shut down too, and the train goes through the Pentagon. So, they were bussing people off, from one side around to the other side, to avoid that, which made my commute home a little more difficult and arduous at the same time.

I get home and we spent... As I'm walking back to the Metro station, I call my daughter in Minneapolis, who was clueless that anything was going on. Somehow or another it hadn't plugged in at that point in time. So, I get back home, and you look at it. Carol had been at school. She had had a student that day for the first time in her several decades of teaching, who had decided that was the day, at about 9:45, to pull the fire alarm. So all of her students are out in the playground, under the flight path of the airplane that went in to the Pentagon. She says, "Boy, if we would have known that, that would have been the time we should have been locked down. not where we were at the time."

Certainly, in that town things got real squirrely for a couple of days because... It was eerie to walk around DC, as quiet and everything as it was. I had a student because I was teaching for Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University over at Andrews Air Force Base. I had two students that were directly involved in this, a navy captain who was stationed on the corridor where the airplane went in, in that corridor. She was not in her office that morning and therefore was very fortunate. But it was a couple or three days before we had contact with her. I had a Secret Service Blackhawk pilot that was in my class who—the first time he sat down and crossed his legs and stretched out, I saw his ankle-mounted pistol down there, and I said, "There's a kid I'm not going to flunk" (DePue laughs)—who was flying Blackhawks as security, then for several months thereafter.

You could not drive into or out of the city for the next year without seeing the big gaping hole or the black hole or the work going on with the side of the Pentagon because it was on that side, on the Headquarters Marine Corps side of the Pentagon. Anytime you came up or down 395 there, you got to look at it. Or any time you went up to headquarters to do something that I needed to do up at Henderson Hall or whatever, it was there.

Working for the FAA, we were on the first airplane that went out of National [Reagan Washington National Airport] to Boston. It was an FAA aircraft that was stationed at the hangar there at National. We got on that

airplane and went up to Boston, looking at some of the security things and some of the issues up there. We did some of the security screening. When you looked at all the events and how the FAA performed.

You saw in the town how the town so drastically changed after that, as far as security and people looking through your backpacks everywhere you went and long lines getting on airplanes and security. I remember the flight out, when I went out on a commercial flight—the first couple of days that that opened up then, other than the FAA flight that I was on—the security guard was ecstatic when they were going through all my gear and found my fingernail file on the end of my fingernail clipper, “Ya, ya, ya.”

I’m talking to this guy with an M-16, who had recognized me from my days on the corridor at Headquarters Marine Corps. He had gotten out of the Marine Corps and was now in the [National] Guard as a reservist there. He’s recognized me, and we’re talking. Like I’m a real threat, an old Marine colonel with a toe clipper or a fingernail clipper. (DePue laughs) “Well, if you want the thing, keep it. I’ll buy a new one. It’s no big deal.” But it was an eerie sense of being in the town. As we tried to get back to some sense of normalcy... And we’ve never completely gotten back to it since then.

The FAA was all about trying to figure out some way to create a sense of security, and we were in the middle of that. We were in the middle of how do we bring all the airplanes down safely, and how do we get the air space back up? How do we start it up again? How do we do that, and how do we correct all that? I was out at the command post at Dulles and other places, working through an After Action Report on how do we do that?

I don’t know that I answered your question because I think you were wanting a more visceral how did I feel about them flying airplanes into buildings and doing that kind of stuff, and I kind of went down the where I was. I guess, because of what I was doing, I got more engaged in how do we make the system work, now that the world has changed, rather than the clinician approach of, gee, I feel terrible that this crap happened. It was more a case of where do we go from here, and how we make the system work? I was working for the FAA, and I was in a human factors capacity, so we looked at how do we do security and how do we keep the security guys alert? Do we do profiling? What kinds of things... So, my response was more around where do we go from here, rather than, I didn’t have time to sit around and mope about it.

DePue: This goes back to where we began this conversation a couple of weeks ago, where you’re an ENTJ. You’re not a feeler; (Tyler laughs) you’re a thinker; you’re a planner; you’re trying to figure out, what’s the proper response, not engaging the emotional side of the human nature.

I wanted to wrap some things up with just a few other questions. You've already expressed in maybe 1,000 ways that you're a Marine to the core. I want you to reflect then on how having all these thirty-plus years serving in the Marine Corps, serving your country, has changed you. Here's the cognitive psychiatrist, trying to figure something like that out. I would also add, you should be somewhat succinct here. (Tyler laughs) Can you even imagine if you had not taken this path in your life?

Tyler: Yeah, I can imagine not having taken that path because there were always forks in the roads. My group commander was a great guy that always talked about forks in the roads, and he always took the fork that had the Long Island iced teas [a cocktail] on it. (both laugh) Yeah, I can imagine other lives. I would not have wanted to have done anything else, as I look back. It was a great career. I did not set out for it to be a career, but I knew I wanted to fly. I thought I wanted to be a Marine before I knew what it really was. The Marine Corps certainly enhances a sense of duty. You get that duty, honor, and commitment thing in there or courage, honor, and commitment. You get... What's West Point's motto?

DePue: Duty, honor, country.

Tyler: Yeah, the same kind of thing. That becomes part of it. Carol likens the Marine Corps to a really special cult. I think there's an element of that to it. It's understanding that you're doing things for a purpose greater than self, and that's been rewarding; I've enjoyed that. I said at my retirement that it was my honor and my duty to serve, and I was privileged to be an officer of the Marines.

DePue: Looking back at your long career, what's the most significant contribution you think you've made?

Tyler: The most satisfying was as a squadron commander. The most significant contribution probably came out of two things, I think, one when I actually caused the establishment of a Marine Corps Safety Department and Center and moved just from aviation safety into across the whole Marine Corps. As I had my orders in hand and we were packing the trash out of our townhouse from my Headquarters tour, I went back in to brief the commandant of the Marine Corps on the establishment of a safety branch for the Marine Corps. We killed more Marines in training accidents than you could think of, driving a tank over a sleeping Marine on field exercises, dumb. There are things we could take out of cockpit resource management, out of standardization, out of things aviation has learned hard experiences from and put them into the ground units as well. So, I managed, through all the appropriate staffing and talking and for about eighteen months of pushing that wet noodle uphill. The decision brief was the day I was packing up and leaving Washington, and that happened.

The second one was a similar thing. As the senior Marine in Orlando, pushing up the package to establish that as a command, a Marine Corps command down there, as the program management office for training devices. That has given great synergism to what the Marine Corps is doing down there and has a big footprint now in Orlando, doing that.

Those two things have had lasting impact on the quality of training and the protecting of the force in the Marine Corps, is how I feel. I feel those were singular accomplishments that my tenacity to keep beating up on my three-star, in both cases, paid off.

DePue: We haven't talked about this much, but I know your son went into the military.

Tyler: He did.

DePue: Do you remember conversations early on, what you were advising him when he was looking at making those kinds of decisions?

Tyler: He visited one college and one college only. That was The Military College of South Carolina, otherwise known as The Citadel. On the ride back to northern Virginia he says, "I know where I'm going to school." He says, "That's the only one I'm going to apply to. If they don't take me, I'm not going to go anywhere else." They accepted him. I paid out of state tuition, and he went there. He did not go on a military scholarship and 49 percent of the graduates... I'm sorry, 51 percent of the graduates do not take a commission when they graduate, even though they have a direct commission possibility.

DePue: Did he not want to go to the Naval Academy or West Point?

Tyler: He did not. He was being rushed by the Naval Academy. His crew coach was a Naval Academy graduate. The academy is an engineering school for the most part. The Navy, they really look for engineers, and he's a history major, a political science guy. That's where his love is, and he didn't want to do that. We kept saying, "But, Rob, you can go there for free, and I don't have to pay out of state tuition."

DePue: West Point always had an engineering background as well but not as strong an emphasis as the Naval Academy would have had.

Tyler: Yeah, but he... No, the Citadel was what he wanted to do. So, off he went. He found great camaraderie there. He graduated with a solid C average (laughs) and graduated. The April of his senior year, he calls up and says, "I don't know how to tell you this, Dad, but I'm not going to the military afterwards." And I said, "Fine, do whatever you want to do." And that was fine. We always raised our kids to do what they wanted to do and where they needed to go.

He got out, and he sold tires at Firestone for a period of time, as a store manager. He said in that phone call, "I've decided I've fallen in love with the city of Charleston." I laughingly say, "And we met her at graduation." He married her a few years later, a year or so later. He then enlisted in the Army because he wanted to fly helicopters, and they were the only service that would guarantee him flight school. But that was if he came in as a warrant officer.

DePue: This sounds relatively familiar.

Tyler: Um-hmm. So, he came in, ran around. He actually did airborne training, which I thought was stupid, and I told him so at the time. I said, "You're jumping out of perfectly good airplanes. You mess up your back, you break a leg or something, you're not going to get to flight school." He elected to stay in the warrant officer program, got his wings. I was down to give him his silver wings and, much like I had earned many decades before, pinned on his lipstick lieutenant bars as a warrant officer and sent him on his way.

He has just recently completed twenty years of flying helicopters, Hueys and Blackhawks, for the Army and got a certificate from Sikorsky [an American aircraft manufacturer] for over 5,000 hours in the Blackhawk and has just taken a position with Flight Safety International, down in Lafayette, Louisiana, teaching people how to fly big helicopters on and off oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico.



*Suzanne and Rob Tyler, (Bob and Carol's daughter and son) during Rob's graduation from the Citadel in Charleston, S.C. in 1990. Rob later became an army warrant officer and helicopter pilot who deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan during his career.*

DePue: I would assume he had experience both in Iraq and in Afghanistan?

Tyler: The army sent him to all the garden spots. He got six months in Haiti, six months in Bosnia, six months in Kosovo, a couple of years in Iraq, and a couple of years in Afghanistan, and a tour in Korea. So, yes, the 10th Mountain Division kept him well deployed. And he married a Navy brat, by the way. So, we have loads of fun on Army-Navy game.

DePue: He hasn't had much fun lately.

Tyler: (laughs) No. Although he's talked about, like I did, his flying over there was good flying and rewarding flying and rewarding missions. You don't like to be anywhere that people are shooting at you. You like the natives to be a little more friendly.

DePue: What did Mom and Dad think about him so frequently going in to harm's way?

Tyler: (sighs) Dad lost [the] father-in-law of the year award. That TJ thing got in the way a couple of times. He'd been flying for several years and had his first in-flight emergency. His bride calls up and is all abuzz about how he's deployed in Korea, and he had this in-flight emergency. He had a fire warning light or something, and he landed the airplane, a precautionary landing and all that sort of stuff, and everything was just wonderful. But, according to her, "Oh he had this emergency, and he could have died." She's all in that feeler mode, and I says, "Well, that's what we train him to do, to be able to handle it and do the right things. I'm glad his training took over and everything's good." So, I lost the father-in-law of the year award that year. (DePue laughs)

Having worked in safety and having worked at a systems command that builds airplanes and writes the specs for them, I was pleased and interested in the airplane he was flying, in the procedures that they were using and that sort of stuff because they were executing the experience that we had gained in the past. Therefore, he was flying safer airplanes, flying airplanes with crashworthy seats, flying airplanes that had more power, flying things and tactics and things that would work better for them over there. So, the senior officer in me is sitting there saying, he's doing all this great stuff.

Did I like him being some place getting shot at? No. Did his mother think that it was worse having a son in combat than a husband in combat? Yeah. I'm not quite sure how I feel about her saying that to me, but I understand it. We agonized over the OPS Tempo of our Marines, watching them do their cycles, and we wished that our son would have made some choices that would have allowed him relief from the deployments.

He elected routinely to come back to the 10th Mountain Division instead of taking a tour at the training command, instead of taking a tour on recruiting or staff duty or somewhere else, which meant he would be deployed



that much more often. We wished—his mother in particular really wished—that he would have seen that there's something to do besides just constantly going back to the sandbox because of what it meant for family disruption and time away from the kids and that sort of stuff. However, those were choices that they made, that he felt compelled to be flying and flying that much and didn't want to be out of the cockpit. The best we could do was kind of just shake the tie-down chains off and say, "You got it, kid. Do what you got to do."

DePue: Do either your son or daughter have any sons of their own?

Tyler: Both of them have at least a son. Our daughter has one son, and our son has two sons, one's in college; the other's a senior in high school. Neither of those two have talked about going into the military, even though both of their grandfathers were career officers.

DePue: This is a lead in to the question; what happens if one of them came and said, "Grandpa, what do you think? I think I want to be an aviator."

Tyler: I'd say, "Go for it." If they said they wanted to be a Marine aviator, I'd say, "I've got a sword here I'll give you when you get out of OCS."

DePue: How would you like to finish up?

Tyler: This has been a fun conversation. Don't know that there's anything else, other than to say that it was a career that I hadn't anticipated. It was good and not bad for an Illinois farm boy. Got to play with great toys and with really some great people.

DePue: Thank you very much, Bob. It's been fun, and I think very illustrative to talk to you, not just about your Vietnam experience, but over the last couple of sessions, we've got a sense of what it is to be a career Marine officer and the kinds of positions you're in and the kinds of experiences you have.

Tyler: Thank you.

DePue: I think it's valuable to preserve that. So, thank you very much.

Tyler: Thank you, sir.

(end of transcript #4)