Gary A. Bauer
Veteran

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Von Hasseln
Interviewer

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Connecticut Street Armory in Buffalo, NY

RH: Mr. Bauer, tell me about when you were born and raised.
GB: I was born in South Buffalo, New York, and I attended Saint Teresa's Grammar School down in South Buffalo on Seneca Street. I then went to Hutch tech [Hutchinson Central Technical] High School down on Chipwood and Elmwood Avenues. Then after that, I went into the navy.

RH: Right out of high school?
GB: Right out of high school.

RH: Why did you go into the navy?
GB: Well, at that time, I was quite young, actually. I was only seventeen, I just turned seventeen in May, and to be honest with you, at that time, to get a decent job, you had to be at least eighteen, and the plants would hire you, but they wouldn't hire you if you weren't eighteen years old. So I was wondering what I was gonna do with myself, so I decided to enlist.

RH: Why in the Navy instead of one of the other services?
GB: I always wanted to go to sea. It was something that I always admired. I wanted to travel, and I thought that was probably the way to do it. That's really the only reason why I picked the Navy.

RH: So what were your initial experiences in the Navy?
GB: Well, right out of boot camp-I went to Bainbridge, Maryland for boot training-and we were the last company, actually, to graduate from Bainbridge Naval Training Center, and then they closed that facility to basic training. I think they had some schools related, but shortly after that, they closed them completely.

After basic training, I was assigned to the USS Essex CVA/CVS-9. The Essex was the original mothership of the thirty-five or thirty-six to come Essex-class carriers. She was commissioned in 1942, in Newport News, and fought during the Pacific Theatre, in Korea, and then was stationed in El Nido. In 1957, they redid her and put a hurricane bow one her and an angle deck, and brought her over to the Atlantic coast through the Panama Canal, and I picked her up in Mayport, Florida in 1957. A couple months after that, we were out on her first med cruise. During that time, it turned to 1958. We were in Europe. It was a normal med cruise, lot of flight operations and so forth and so on. I worked as a flight tech and did plane handling, directing, and I was in the crash and salvage crew. We were ready to come home -I believe we were in Naples- and all of a

sudden we got emergency orders. We had to come back off liberties and so forth, we even left men there and we had to bring them back by plane [Laughter].

But to proceed to Beirut, Lebanon, apparently there was some actions going on there, and the United States government decided to land Marines in Beirut, and they wanted the Essex to provide the air support. So, we headed out, and it was twenty-one or thirty, twenty-some days of straight around-the-clock flight operations. It was pretty tough [Laughter]. There was a lot of shooting going on in that situation because we had planes coming back shot up pretty bad, had some accidents, they were pretty severe. Because of that activity, a lot of small arms fire. We figured they were twenty millimeter, they were using, judging by the holes and so forth. We had a couple people lose their lives in that action.

Then that subsided, some waters, we were relieved, and were about again to head back. Then, lo and behold, waters again. Now we had to go to Formosa.

So apparently the Communist Chinese were massing troops to attack Taiwan,-which is now Taiwan but was then Formosa-Quemoy, and Matsu Islands. So we were told that we would head to the Suez Canal. We were to go to the Pacific Fleet and reinforce the 7th Fleet. So that's what we did and we were there for about forty-five to sixty days. Again, there was a bombardment on august twenty-third about ‘58, where the Communist Chinese bombarded Taiwan and it lasts for twenty-four hours or exceeded that. We were actually blocking the Communist Chinese, who had a quarter million troops massed near shore. As far as the eye can see, troops, armaments, whatever, ok and the streets aren't that big twenty-six miles wide, I believe something like that. We were constantly launching jets and aircraft to just threaten, you know, posture, so to speak. However, they had long-range artillery that they kept firing on Formosa.

So to this day, there's a sister of the Taiwanese Embassy in New York City and all around different cities in the United States. They’d invite us to receptions and last year I was invited with some others to New York for the Badge of Honor reception. Number 8228, they called it the A23 bombardment. They're very thankful that we saved them from invasion.

So, we were relieved by the Midway, USS Midway, and then we were allowed to come back home. While we came back home we came back around the Cape of Good Hope and through the Indian Ocean. Well, we ran into a typhoon, and we lost both of our front catwalks. They got peeled back about sixty feet because the waves were coming over the bow of ours. We were ninety feet over the water and the waves are breaking up over the bow of the ship. For two days we suffered with that and we damage to our expansion plates. They are three of those on the carriers, one up forward, the middle and back in the aft, it allows the ship to give and take during wave action. The wave actions were so severe that they were pulling the expansion plates. You could actually see in between the expansion plates, so that did damage there. We didn't sustain too much damage. It could’ve been a lot worse, but we lost some planes over the side. We had them tied down, twelve and sixteen tie downs, but it didn't do any good. We were strapped in our bunks for two days, allowed to take chances, if you wanted to take a

chance. You could try to get to the mess hall to eat some crackers and things like, or change the barf pails. There was a very bad typhoon and it got scary, the destroyers were buried. You could see them they'd go down and all you could see is a little bit of the mast, completely buried. We didn't lose any ships but in World War II they lost a couple. I saw films and it was basically the same kind of storm.

Then we came home and after that we made another med cruise but then we were on flight operations up off the coast. I believe it was off the coast of Norfolk, just before we went on a med cruise in '59. We had a very bad accident. I was a flight deck director at the time and we had planes parked near our number three elevator with the crash-crane. It was normal operations, it was a daytime, the weather was good, I recall it like yesterday. Fury, an FJ1, came in for landing. The Fury was the Navy's answer to the Sabre jet. Comes in, tipped its right wing starboard, hit skidded and went into four planes parked as well as the crash-crane. Well, underneath the four planes there was four or five plane captains. So, we lost all those people plus the trust of the pilot. That fire took us eight hours to get under control. All the aviation fuel was spilling down over the flight deck down, into the hangar deck. It was starting to get down and float round down in the hangar deck. If it would have gotten into the ammo and into the gasoline down there, we would've had a real mess. It was a real mess anyway, but we did manage to beat it. As I said it took us eight continuous hours of firefighting. We lost five people that I recall, maybe six. That put a damper on our cruise for a while, so we had to go back into dry-dock and you get the damage repaired. We had to dispose of the aircraft and that became pretty interesting because we didn't have the crash-crane anymore. That meant we had to improvise ways of getting rid of the burnt aircraft. We threw millions of dollars over the side, unbelievable. So we were pushing them over, using little tractors with tow bars, we were using forklifts, and everything at our disposal to get rid of these aircraft. This was before we went in for repairs. We went in for repairs, came out, and we left the med cruise.

The med cruise went pretty well as I recall. It was a normal thing, our normal operational duties back then: We would be able to sea probably for a week or ten days, maybe fifteen. We would fly and do flight operations. Then we would come into port, usually stay three to five days, out again, more operations. This was a normal situation, unless we were involved in crisis. Well, then it was round the clock thirty or forty days, whatever it took, in all kinds of weather you lived up there. We didn't sleep very well, we had very poor sleep habits. We would be up there for twelve hours straight and then if we got a four hour break we usually just slept in a passageway or up on the flight deck. It was warmer in the net or in a catwalk or a coffee locker or something until had to go back out again. If we had an eight hour break, which was rare, we would go down, shower, shave go get some chow, and maybe go to bed.

But we were always scummy and dirty so we never really wanted to go in our bunks, we would wind up just sleeping in place [Laughter]. They let us go as far as inspections and things like that. We kind of got away from that, we didn't have to deal with it like the other sailors. They kind of let the Airedales go. We had round-the-clock food, the chow hall was always open for us guys. We all had different colored shirts, yellow shirts, blue shirts, green shirt, red shirts and everything. We would come down to chow at one

o'clock in the morning, [Laughter] ten o'clock in the morning. The guys that dole out the food down there they'd just go like "Oh, jeez, here they come." We're a pretty ragged bunch, lot of camaraderie. It was tough, had to really dependent on behind your shipmate to watch a bed for you. You had to be in pretty good shape, you had to be pretty fleet of foot and pretty nimble. You got that way, I mean just you adapted. A lot of people got hurt but I was lucky. The only injury I ever had was I got some piece of flight deck in my eye at one time, didn't have my goggles on. There was another thing, we didn't even wear them, we were so primitive. We didn't have any goggles or we didn't even have any of those Mickey Mouse ears, just didn't do it.

No one said nothing. We had gloves and shoes. There was a little mini operation to that piece of shrapnel out of my ass. Other than that the only other injuries that I sustained was when we crossed the equator and I had to run the gauntlet of about nine hundred sailors with. They would line the length of the flight deck with one on either side. It was part of the initiation of crossing the equator. They soaked the pieces of fire hose with salt water and they dried in the sun and if you fell. You didn't want to fall and you didn't want to put your hands back here because if you did that you got your fingers broke and if you fell you really got beat. I hear now they don't do that anymore.

RH: No I haven't heard of that lately.
GB: No, I think they did away with that. But that was just part of the initiation. It last all day. You had to crawl through garbage, tanks of garbage. You had fire hoses turned on ya. You got beat up, ya know, with fire hoses. A few guys would corner you in a corner and whack you around with the fire hoses. If you didn't have any enemies you were OK, but if you had some enemies on the ship you were, ya know.

RH: Do you still have your shellback significant at home?
GB: Yeah I still have it all at home. In fact I had it out the other day. I've got a lot of that stuff in a book. It's quite painful.

RH: So did you spend the rest of your tour in the Navy on the Essex?
GB: The whole time in there I was on the Essex. In 1960 we received orders. The Essex, see, was becoming small. The planes were becoming larger in the Navy. We were getting FAUs, A3Ds. We were getting some big stuff. Our and ship couldn't handle them anymore. We were having a lot of accidents. The navy at that time was really, we didn't have any super carriers. The Forrestal was the first one, and that was the only one we had. Then the Saratoga came along. Then the Independence I believe, and then they started going after that. Then they took our ships, the Essex class carriers. Us, the Intrepid, the Randolph. Well the Intrepid the Hancock's and them they redid them put steamcats on them and reused them in Vietnam. Us, they turned into a CVS or a submarine chaser in 1960. We then were stationed at Quonset Point, Rhode Island. It was OK. You know, but the excitement was gone. We weren't an attacker anymore. We were just going out on these little junkets. I was about ready to get out anyway so it was kind of dull after that. Then you just kind of couldn't wait until you got out.

RH: What kind of anti-submarine aircraft did they use?

GB: S2Fs, S2Fs. And then we had A3Ds with sonar on them. Not A3Ds, I'm sorry. AD6s or AD12s something like that. And S2Fs, double props. I recall those two anyway and then the helicopters.

RH: And where would you patrol?
GB: The Atlantic pretty much. We did a lot of north Atlantic activity. Up around Halifax toward the North Pole. I got a bluenose card. We went up there one time. And oh that reminds me of something too. It was in November. 1960, I believe. Yeah, I was going to get out in '61 so. It was 1960. I still celebrate that day to this day. It was the worst day and night I ever had in flight then. We got up in there and we were doing flight operations and it started sleeting. And we were up near almost towards Halifax. We were up almost to the North Pole area and it started sleeting. North Atlantic was very rough. And they didn't have our weather bureau broke out so all the guys on the flight deck all we had was our jerseys and we had two three of them on, gloves. That's it. And they didn't have the stuff, big jackets. We had big fall weather jackets and pants and stuff. We didn't have them broke out from down below and for some reason they didn't get 'em broke out. And em, it was a very very bad evening. We almost had problems. We almost guys who wouldn't go out, wouldn't go back up. And I remember I had a crew of six men under me that night and I really really had to use my selling skills to get those guys back up there and it was really difficult. I finally had to go to my lieutenant and I said, "You gotta to do something here". I've been on this thing a long time but I've never saw it like this and finally they I don't know what the problem was.

RH: What did they bring out the [unclear]?
GB: Some sort of a snafu, paperwork. I don't know, who knows. You know how that goes. But finally it did come the next day when morning broke ok we had it. It was over then ya know but I'll never forget that evening. It was just a terrible night we were up there all night long.

RH: But you got out in '63?
GB: No, I got out in '61. I was separated in '61.

RH: Mhm.
GB: And then I was discharged in '63. I got my discharge in '63.

RH: Did you pull reserve duty after you got out?
GB: They had inactive. It was, you didn't really have to do anything except be around in case something happened.

RH: So what did you do when you left the Navy?
GB: Well, when I got out of the Navy I worked for Republic Steel and I worked there about three years. Met my wife. Got married in '63. Then stayed in the steel business and tied down with a distributor in Buffalo and went back to school at night and became an inside salesman with a local steel firm. And then I went on the road as an outside salesman in 1970 and I've been there ever since.

RH: Children?

GB: Two children. A girl, thirty-two, Natalie, lives in Orlando, FL. She's a graduate of Geneseo. And Guy, our son. He's twenty-eight. He's the teacher I was telling you about. Graduate of Cortland State and lives in Winchester, VA. And my wife, Dolores, who's put up with me for thirty-eight years.

RH: So you think being in the Navy made a difference in your life?
GB: Oh, it sure did.

RH: How so?
GB: Well, it taught me to be persistent and to be able to put up with adversity and it taught teamwork, how to overcome certain situations intelligently. I still to this day feel that, at eighteen years old, besides raising my family, it was the biggest responsibility they put in our hands. It was the biggest responsibility I ever had in my life. It was responsible for pilot's lives, multimillion dollar aircraft, because when on an aircraft carrier or on a flight deck, as much as maybe the officers don't like to hear this, when the pilots come out of the ready room and they get in that plane, we're the boss until they leave. We're calling the shots. We're telling them what to do until they leave the plane or leave the carrier. And they'll attest to that. And as I said it was an awful lot of responsibility for young people and we all did it and handled it. It was to get one hundred aircraft off the carrier in twenty minutes you got to have a good team.

RH: Now let's go back and talk about that a little bit. First, the actual operations on the terror deck, at times it must have been like bedlam.
GB: It was.

RH: To keep everything straight.
GB: It could be. You had pitching and rolling the dice which caused a lot of problems. I remember one incident where we had planes coming in late. We had an awful lot of rolling activity out there that day where the sea wasn't. It wasn't this kind of stuff. It was rolling and you could actually stand on the flight deck and it would roll to port and you would looking at. You'd be looking right at the sea and it would roll back. Once the carrier started rolling like that there's not a lot you can do about it, you know. So we had some planes that were late coming back. I don't know they didn't time it right or something. At that time I was a driving, the I was in repair aide which was to crash the salvage rescue team and I was driving the crash crane. I was one of two drivers. Plane came in it was an AD prop, propeller driven. It came in. It hit. Busted its landing gear and smashed its prop all up and it's laying on the flight deck. Now the reason it happened was because of the way it was just ridiculous the way it was rolling. It was pretty tough for the pilots. This was the last plane. In fact, luckily, was the last plane and so now we had to get the plane up and out of there. So the flight deck officer Bowery come over and said to me can you get the Toledo out of there and I said well I don't know the way it's rolling I said we'll try it cause we parked her on the starboard side near the number three elevator. We would put the wheels right on the drains and the drains were the last part of the flight deck besides your safety net and a safety net would never hold a crane anyway if it ever fell on it. But anyway, the crane we had back then had a swivel cab it went this way and that's the way you steered it. You could swivel all the way around and pull the crane if you wanted to but to bring it out of the

spot I had to swing it to the left, OK, and then start to pull it out and then bring the crane this way and once I got out a little further then I could straighten it out and drive it out pull the crane system. But so I said whelp we'll try it. He's standing right there, the lieutenant. And I tell the guys, untie it. Now the ships rolling and I'm saying to myself now you want to time this right so then when the ship's this way you want to swing the cab and then pull her out and then somehow get her stabilized. Right. Well, I tried it. She went this way, I start to swing. She come back. Right. Now the cab's here and the ship's going port and the wheels on the port side are a foot and a half off the ground and she's going to go over. I said "Oh, no". So I swing the cab all the back real fast. "Ba boom ba boom ba boom" and it went back down. I told the guys chalk it up and tie it down. So they chalk it up, tie down. Looked at Lieutenant Welder and I said (shaking head no). He goes "You're right. Forget that." So, comes up and says "what do you think? I said well, we're going to have to check with the first class and we're going to have to get the airbags and the compressors and the dollies to get the plane off. That was the next, that was the only avenue left. So we got the airbags out, got the air compressors out. Got them under the plane. Pumped them up, put the dollies under there, ya know, ropes and tied down jerry rig it, ya know, push the thing to the elevator and then we had to get it down. But then that was tricky because we had to have chop guys on each side because the ships rolling and the plane captain is up there but the brakes really he ain't got any brakes because landing gear is busted on the one side, especially all the hydraulic oil is all over the place. They gotta put shocks under the dollies but there's no brakes on them things. So we're pushing the plane and putting things down and the planes going like this and the ship's going like this.

Then we had to recover a jet one time. That was another tricky operation. A jet on the catapult went like this. It flamed out and it dumped but when it dumped it Went like this. The pilot did eject. He ejected under water. He come bobbing around. Right. So then the plane, for some strange reason was an 84D. It was the type that John McCain flew off the Forrestal. It looks like a mosquito. It was a pretty powerful airplane in Vietnam. It didn't sink. Usually the jets sink right away. They would fill up and then but this one didn't sink so we said well, the seas were in pretty good shape so we said let's try and salvage the thing, right. They sent out a couple of liberty launches with a bunch of us. And seamen would be the reconnaissance on that, would work reconnaissance but then they took us guys we had life jackets and on we had wire ropes and all kinds of stuff ya know. And they threw us out there and they said ya know we gotta get wire slings on this thing and then we'll get the ship near it and then get the crane. We had a crane attached to the ship. It was a big ship. A big grabby crane that used to pick up nets and stuff. Get that out, swing that out drop it, hook it up, and we can get the plane, hook it up, swing it back onto the number three elevator and save the plane. Well, it all sounded real simple. It took a solid day. We were out there swimming around. We had marine guards out there with M1s so no sharks. We're all soaking wet. We're swimming around with life jackets. We're trying to get slings on this plane. We finally did. We got it all hooked up with turnbuckles and so forth and we got it on.

RH: When you were on deck during operations, how did you keep everything straight? I mean.

GB: Well flight deck control was located in the island and we had a mock ship that was maybe the size of this couch maybe a little bigger and it was the flight deck itself and on that flight deck there was various spots on all sides of the ship, over here and the back half section and so forth. The flight deck was separated into three sections: fly one, fly two and fly three. Fly one would go to the front of the island. Fly two was from the front of the island structure to the end of the island structure. There was the mid-ships. And fly three would be the resting gear portion of the ship and the number three elevator. And then we had the two crews in each section so we had six crews and I was always involved with crew six except one time I worked in mid-ships. But it was pretty much we were in charge of recovering the aircraft and getting them forward for launching. Like during recovery it was pretty much when I was flight deck director I would just catch them at the hook and send them forward. When we were respotting planes the propeller driven planes would all be in a pack flight three area and we had four lines of prop planes and it was our responsibility to spot those planes and them get them into position. And then when I was directing it was my responsibility I had to spot those planes. I had a crew under me. I had six guys. We would spot the planes and then during launch it was my responsibility me and another flight directors to get them out, taxi them out, and pass them up to amidships where they used to deck launch them. If they were jets. We had a few jets on the flight three area. We had jets on the three elevator. We had jets on the number two and we would handle them also. And they would be. The jets would have their exhaust pointed over to the side, so when they cranked them up the exhaust would be going over the side of the ship. We would then taxi them out pass them out to the director in flight two. He would pass them out to the director in flight one and then they had catapult crews up there and they had toolbar guys. They used to get, lock onto the front wheel. The director would bring the plane up. He would steer it onto the catapult-this is all primitive stuff-steer it onto the catapult [motions by pulling inward]. The jet blast thing would come up, which never worked [Laughter]. Always had holes in it or whatever. Then they would launch the jets, that way [points to the left]. We had two catapults, whereas the big guys now got four to six catapults.

RH: And the different colored shirts.
GB: Yellow shirt was your flight deck directors. Blue shirts are your handlers and tractor drivers. Red shirts was your repair aide, crash and salvage team and/or gas people. They used to come up from Hanger D. Green shirts your jet starters and your electronics people. Red again or red and black I believe or red and something was ammo. They used to come up from Hanger D too. They were pretty much Hanger D people. Flight deck people were yellow shirts, red shirts, blue shirts and then your green shirts were resting gear and?

RH: And the purpose for having these different colored shirts?
GB: Well, everybody had different jobs and you kind of have to wait for the next guy to get his job accomplished ya know so you knew who was around the plane. So you knew what was going on. And brown shirts were plane captains. And they usually squadron people. They were connected with either navy squadrons or marine squadrons. They were in charge of the airplane itself. So we used to work hand in hand with the plane captains cause when we were spotting the aircraft the plane captains would have to ride

the brakes of their plane. They were responsible for their plane. We used to have to take care of those guys and make sure nothing happened to them.

RH: Well we're getting down to towards the end of the tape so a couple of quick questions. When you were engaged in the operations [unclear], did you ever think you might be standing at the door of World War III?
GB: At that time I can't ever recall thinking that but now that I think back and I think of this that was a pretty traumatic time. I heard things later. I don't know if it even bears repeating but President Eisenhower really read the Chinese communists the riot act and actually threatened to remove their devises. In fact I found out we had a nuclear device on our ship and so did the Midway.

RH: Well the Navy will never confirm or deny that.
GB: Navy won't confirm it.

RH: Why did you volunteer to participate in this program?
GB: I felt that this story. This had to be told because well, for years I heard we had a cakewalk and after Korea nothing was happening and the guys in the military were just goofing around and all this and we had to deal with a lot. We had to deal with first of all a fleet that was small and we weren't equipped at that time. We were downscaled because I guess just after Korea they just downscaled everything. And the case of our carriers we just were outmoded. We lost a lot of people because of outmoded equipment.

RH: We're coming down to the last minute or two. Any other final thoughts? Anything you'd like to add that we haven't discussed?
GB: Not really except that, it was quite an experience and that I would do it again. I think that today a lot of young people, a lot of young men are missing something by not having a service experience.

RH: Thank you.