Stephen A. Caine
Veteran

Mike Russert and Wayne Clark
Interviewers

Interviewed on Nov. 17, 2006
at the New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, NY

SC: Stephen Caine
MR: Mike Russert
WC: Wayne Clark

WC: Can you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth please?
SC: Stephen Caine, May 2nd, 1942, New York, New York.

WC: Okay. What was your educational background prior to entering service?
SC: I had a BS from Cortland. I had an MS from Cornell and Elmira the College.

WC: Did you enlist or were you drafted?
SC: I enlisted.

WC: Okay. Were you in an officer's candidate program?
SC: Correct.

WC: Where was this?
SC: That was at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas.

WC: Why did you decide to enlist and why did you pick the Air Force?
SC: That is an interesting question. I didn't have to and I was a school teacher so I was exempt from the draft. I got interested in aviation and earned all my pilot ratings and decided I wanted to fly with the airlines and actually worked at a place called the ……. I was an instructor there. I realized I didn't want to continue to do that and the airlines had stopped hiring but I needed to build more time. So I wanted to go into the Air Force and fly bigger planes and then get out and be an airline pilot. I went in and already having all my pilot ratings, I did well in pilot training where I had a choice of the planes I could take. I was even offered the first C5. But by the time I went through pilot training, I realized if I could be I wanted to be a fighter pilot and I say this humbly, it just so happens because I had experience, I was number one in my class so I could pick my airplane so I picked the Air4.I found my niche in life so I never decided to go with the airlines.

WC: Could you tell us about your training experiences?
SC: Sure. First I have to say something about my wife. She married a school teacher and paid for me to get my pilot ratings and then I decided to join the Air Force. I use to get home at a reasonable time and it wasn't dangerous and then I told her I wanted to join the Air Force and

our second child was on the way and she supported me. Two or three days after my second child was born we moved to Enid, Oklahoma where my training was. She was an amazing woman and still is, supporting me throughout. Pilot training in Enid, Oklahoma Advanced Air Force Base … you had a small reciprocating engine like a Cessna 172 for very basic training to cull those who might not be adaptable to flying and that was followed by a T37 which was a small jet which was as fast as a Mustang in WWII. And then the T38 which was a supersonic jet, in which you had training, formation and night flying and many of the things you do when you are fighters. After I got the fighter I had another six to eight months further training in the F4 where you learned formation, instrument training and how to drop bombs, how to strafe, how to fight air combat ,how to plan missions with large numbers of airplanes, how to analyze a threat and use the right tactics and so forth.

WC: Now what year was this?
SC: I was commissioned in May of 1970 and it was June when I went to, after going to survival school (sea, jungle and POW), training. I graduated from that in 1971and then actually left the F4 training in January or February of 1972 and went to my first operational unit in February of 1972… I went to Thailand and Vietnam.

WC: So you were about 30 years old at that time?
SC:I was twenty seven. I just made it in by the skin of my teeth. I was not the highest ranking man but I was the old man.

MR: Now what did you like about the F4?
SC: The mission. First, the F4 is very versatile. It was used to fly air combat, to support the ground troops and to carry nuclear weapons too. It could do everything you could do in a fighter. At the time, it was the most high-tech powerful versatile airplane and it was the most challenging. Being in the fighter business the Air Force was the top of the line. If you were lucky enough to be given the God-given talent to do it, it was the full use of your talent. It was a mission of …great team work. It was like being on a ball team but for serious business, very gratifying. I believe in military service as you all do. I felt like I was contributing to my country.

MR: Now was your wife able to travel around with you from base to base?
SC: We all went together to Enid Oklahoma and then to Phoenix and then we moved to Albergue (?), New Mexico home of the 49th and got a place on base there. Then when I went over to Thailand, it was a unit move over where it was a temporary duty type of thing although it ended up being six months. She stayed right there. When I got back I stayed there another six months and then went to Korea for a year. She moved to Connecticut near her mother. We have moved everyplace ever since together- twenty plus moves. We spent a lot of time in Europe, in the Southwest and three times in Washington.

MR: Can you tell us about your time in Thailand and Vietnam?
SC: Sure. When you leave F4 training you are what they call phase 2; you aren't combat ready yet. You had the basic skills but you had to be trained in the unit mission and you do a bit more refinement. And I was phase 2 when I got there and when the unit was deployed to South Vietnam or to Thailand, I was still phase 2. I still count my lucky stars. I have to give the name of a guy, Don Hobard, who was the squadron commander. I was in the 8th Tack Fire Squad; he

took the phase 2 unit guys with him when they deployed. Other squadrons didn't do that. So when I got into combat, the first 10 rides, I had to have an instructor with me because I wasn't mission ready yet. The F4 is a 2 person flying machine so after that I had a weapons system operator flying in the back seat and that is a navigator who has been trained in the operation systems in the F4.In Vietnam, the reason we went in the first place, during the Nixon period of Vietnam and they pulled out a lot of USA ground troops and in the Spring of 1972 the North invaded with regular forces into South Vietnam and the United States sent 5 fighter wings over there. My wing was known as a dual based wing and was dedicated to NATO and Europe. I had just finished a letter to my parents saying "This will never happen to us."(Being sent over) Because we were dedicated to Europe; we had a nuclear mission. A week later, there wasn't an airplane on the ramp left. There were 94 F4's and they were all deployed. The first missions that I really went on were close air support missions. We had Mark82's and napalm and we were supporting ground forces and most importantly were in close contact where they would have Vietcong or North Vietcong putting pressure on them they couldn't handle themselves. A forward air controller (FAC) would mark the targets for us and we would go and strike them. I first want to tell you the kind of profile we would use on them. We basically had 2 ways of approaching missions, actually more than that. We were in Thailand so we had to be refueled mid-air to get to the target in Vietnam. So we would take off out of Takhli which was in central Thailand and then just on the border of Vietnam we would hook up with a tankard. We would refuel there and then we would go into South Vietnam. We would be told where a FAC would be and we would meet up with him. He would describe where the troops were and what the best approach to the target would be – North, South, East or West- what a safe bailout area was and we would go in and strike the target. We would normally recover in Vietnam. We would come off the target do a battle damage check and then go either to abase called Da Nang in northern South Vietnam or Benwah's (?) near Saigon in southern Vietnam. We would reload there and then go up and hit another target and come back to one of those bases or hit a target then a tankard and come home. So there were times when we would leave Thailand, hit a tankard, hit a target and land in South Vietnam take off hit a target and land take off hit a target hit a tankard and head home. We would use that profile too for hitting targets in southern North Vietnam. If we went into North Vietnam we would generally be hitting bridges or supplies before they got into South Vietnam. The other kind of mission was only out and back at that was when we went deep into North Vietnam into the Route Packs 5 and 6 up around Hanoi and traditionally for that we would get up 3:30, 4:00 in the morning. Then brief. Then we'd take off at the crack of dawn and then we headed up into the Gulf of Tonkin to refuel and come in over Haiphong which is right below China. Or we'd come up over Laos into North Vietnam. The targets we would hit there were Airfield, railroad yards, and barracks. Probably my most exciting mission was going after a MiG base. Earlier in the war, I was called Linebacker Two , and I could attack the MiG bases and that's where defenses were the highest. I was a Lieutenant so generally I was the last guy in line. So you would have 24 airplanes, this wasn't World War II where there were thousands, so there were aircraft that would go in and throw some chaff around to muck up their radar. Some Wild Weasels to strike some SAM sites. Then you'd have us come, by the time the 24 arrived this thing would be 20 miles long and the sky would be a dome of flak over the base, course you'd have SAM's coming up. We had electronic pods which were countermeasures for the SAM's and nobody in our unit ever got hit. We we're lucky. I flew 110 missions there. The unit… we had back seaters and front seaters. So you were a junior guy if you were a front seat pilot. The lieutenant, weapons operator, was in the back. Most of the guys in in the outfit had

been there twice before. Our unit was there for 6 months and we flew over 8000 missions. We flew many missions at night, a little more than half. That was pretty thrilling. Just the environment, thunderstorms. You could see the enemy fire a lot better but they couldn't see you unless they had a radar gun. Just to get out and back through that environment was trying.

WC: Did you have any encounters with MiGs at all?
SC: No, I never did. There were units whose jobs were to fight MiGs, but I never tangled with them.

WC: How long would the close air missions from Thailand take?
SC: Normally you'd have a eight hour day, but sometimes we had to take 1. But I've had missions were I was in the air eight hours because of bad weather and constant refueling.

MR: Did you ever have to stay over in Vietnam?
SC: Yes, one of the most interesting times I had was when my plane broke at Da Nang. There were gunships around the base at night. I'd flown into the area around Hue, just south of the DMZ, and my aircraft had a generator problem. So I stayed on the ground and I wanted to go up on a FAC. So I went to the squadron leader to ask if I could get a ride with them and this crusty Lt. Colonel came out and said I'll take you. So he took me up about 100 ft off the ground and he took me where I was the day before and we showed me the guys on the beach with their AK-47's and where one of his guys won the Medal of Honor. He knew he could eject but seat two could not so he decided to stick with it. The other guy got out but the other guy drowned. And I'd been around Saigon with broken airplanes and they always treated us very hospitably.

WC: When you went on the close air support missions as opposed to missions into North Vietnam, what were the differences in ordinance.

SC: The ones in South Vietnam were more anti-personnel. So we had Snake-Eyes (Mark 82, 500 pounder with a fuse extender so the bomb would go off three feet above the ground so you could kill more people. Same with Napalm. War is dirty stuff, we also had CBU Cluster munitions. Missions North you'd put a delay on the bomb so it could penetrate the ground and then explode. That was good against cement, we'd often put caps on the bombs so they would penetrate.

WC: What was it like on your base in Thailand?
SC: We had tankers, air refueling kind of guys. Let me back up a bit, we'd reopened the base. It was closed in about 1968. There was an operation to bring these Five Fighter wings over. So we re-opened Takhl. We had to clear out snakes, the barbeque was mattress springs, the pool near the officers club was used for fires… we had to bring in bedding and medical supplies everything. Then after the bases had been re-established they brought in tankers, KC-135's, one of the squadrons came over from Vietnam. There were units that spent the entire war in Vietnam but our entire unit came over and our entire unit went home. The units were very congenial but there was no getting together except for mission planning. Life was, seven days a week, when we flew we flew at night so we often got back at four or five in the morning. We'd go to the bar, we had a little bar. After living through a night mission you had to talk about it over a few beers. We went to bed at 8:00 AM, slept 7 or 8 hours, got up and at 4:30 started getting ready again, then take off at sunset. This was the routine for six days a week. On the seventh day you'd be a duty

officer. If you had a mission North you'd sleep at night as best you could and get up, do your work, and get home around two in the afternoon. Those were pretty complex missions, not as big as World War 2 though. Later on the war we started getting Laser Guided Bombs, then four planes could do what a hundred could do. Most of my experience was after that.

WC: When did you leave Southeast Asia?
SC: I was there six months. I got 243 hours of combat time. I went there was there as a junior lieutenant, got shot at quite a bit, came back a flight leader. Then I went to Korea for a year. The mission in Korea… there was always something happening. The mission there was air defense, we're close air support. We sat, Air Defense Alert, and sat Nuclear Alert, they would put nukes on the bottom of an F4. That was 1973 and I'll always remember it because that was when the Yom Kippur War was in Israel and the Russians said we'd better watch out and we better not help them. Nixon put the entire military on Defcon-3, the step before all-out war. When you sat Nuclear Alert, you had these codes in your cockpit, practice and real. You would practice quite a bit. The Pentagon would flash an alert to base and you would scramble, rush to your airplane and you didn't know if it was real or fake. When we went Defcon-3 we took the practice stuff out of the plane, I was on Nuclear Alert and they scrambled the Air Defense Fighters, and we thought the war had begun. What it really was that a Blackbird had had an engine failure and that fighters were needed to bring it down. So that was an interesting year, it really helped me with my career. But then I went back to Halmond, the same base I was at before, and I ended up being one of the initial pilots of the F-16 in the Air Force. They selected ten pilots to be the first pilots and I had been to weapons school, like Top Gun, that was interesting.

WC: How did the F-16 compare to the F-4?
SC: It was a single seat, single engine airplane. It had a better than a one to one thrust rate (gestures up) so it could accelerate straight up. It could pull 9 g's. It was fully computerized, it had this thing called Fly-By-Wire. You'd sit 30 degrees back in your seat, the radar system hardly ever broke like the F4, It was a quantum leap in capability. Now the mission it did… I'll blend in a little of the Cold War here… things were constantly changing throughout my service, Vietnam was a subset of the Cold War as was Korea, My outfits then were mostly dedicated for going to Europe to fight the Russians. The scenario we always trained for was the following: the Soviets always had many more ground troops than NATO did and they had many more airplanes too. ..a lot of times we practiced with ground troops, called Crest-to-Cap, they'd bring hundreds of thousands of ground troops in the fall, hundreds of fighter wings too. We were tied with bases, places to go in case we punched out, we learned the terrain, we learned secret areas and so forth. We had targets overseas, that we studied in the U.S. The scenario in the Cold War was that the Soviet Union would come in with fighters and bombers and attack Western Europe. Our first job in the F4 and the F16 was to rise up and counter them and then go to their airfields and reduce their air force so they couldn't help the ground troops. Our next job as fighters was to help the ground troops like we did in Vietnam, Close Air Support, we were also supposed to do Interdiction where we hit their supplies. We came to the realization was that they had such great ground forces that we had to use Tactical Nukes to knock out bridges and stuff. Big stuff, about the size of Hiroshima. Two guys in an F4 or one guy in an F16 could do that. We had all kinds of safety measures: We were on "Human Reliability" monitoring us for undue tension and that we were reliable. That's what I trained for, the F16 was significantly better in all of these fields.

WC: Did you ever have any problems with computers and such?
SC: No, I went out to Edwards and they were still in the process of testing, and I became an instructor pilots but we barely knew how to work the computers. There were times we would just mess up the computers, we would get to the end of the runway and we would say "I think I messed up there can you help me back out." It was good to have radio.

WC: Would you speak about MiG's in Europe?
SC: Redflag. They realized that most losses were on the first ten missions of a pilots experiences in combat. So tactical air command came up with this massive training exercise called Redflag. It was all around Nellis AFB in Nevada. Hundreds and hundreds of miles, they'd set up SAM's, Radar, Target Arrays. They could create scenarios that were very similar to going into the Warsaw Pact in Europe in war. There would be days were I would go in leading some 70 odd airplanes, which is big for modern airplanes. So you'd go in and you'd have aggressor airplanes and people keeping track of everything. Now, this just became declassified several weeks ago. They had a program called ConstantPeg where the United States had gotten MiG-17's, MiG-19's and MiG-21's and we would fly against them as a subset of Redflag. You could experience their characteristics. In the F-16 days they also got a Flogger which was a later generation swing-wing. This was highly classified, I still don't know how they got it. But it did help with training. But, I didn't fight MiG's in actual combat.

MR: How much training did those fellas flying he MiG's have?
SC: They were the best of the best of air combat guys. They were very proud and very good.

SC: The other thing I want to tell you about the Cold War is that it was pretty hot for some people. I know personally 52 pilots that got killed, most of them were friends of mine. Two of them in Vietnam. The rest practicing to fight the Soviet Union. We would practice at about 100ft, at 500 knots, and we'd have to do these Pop-Up maneuvers and the SAM environment was so pervasive you had to get close to the ground to avoid the missiles. So a lot of guys died in the Cold War. Good thing it never happened. I had an opportunity to be a squadron commander at Hahn in Germany You brought your families over and you knew that they could be attacked by the Soviet Union at any moment. We always practiced in gas maSCs, very real exercises. We had bunkers we lived in. We would practice Sortie Raids and that was where we lost some guys. To practice for a fight. They supposedly had a plan to bring these families home but. Then, after being a squadron commander for a while, I came back to school and had a stint with the state department. My job there was to draw down the forces in Europe, the wall had fallen so we went from about 400 thousand troops to about 100 thousand. I was going to the Vice-Wing Commander of the 86th Wing at Ramstein, but they day I got there my boss left and I became the commander. This was about an 8000 person base. There was also the Commandant of the Kaiseslaught community which was 60,000 and on that base we had two squadrons of F-16's , a squadron of VIP Planes, a squadron of Hospital Airplane. The former Yugoslavia that started, the country started breaking up and our country has started flying over the no-flying zones , Bosnia Herzegovina. There was all kind of ethnic cleansing going on and the Serbs had airplane that they could bomb villages with and we would shoot them down with. We put F16's up over there, one of my guys shot down four airplanes that were bombing a Muslim Village. They'd have mortar attacks too. At Ramstein we had this big hospital called Landstuhl. Now, we bring people there out of the middle east. One of the most unbelievable things from my life, some

Russians airplanes were going to bring some of these mortar attack victims. I went out to greet them, thinking the world had changed.

WC: You were in Israel prior to this?
SC: In the early days of the F16's

(BREAK IN RECORDING)

NATO all had a part in building a piece of it. Some parts of the F16 were shipped on Russian ships. I have some good Dutch friends that I trained. We also trained the Israelis and the Egyptians. We had Israelis come to Hill AFB, when they fight, they fight and talk because you have to coordinate with what is going on. The Israelis normally speak in Hebrew, but we had to ask them to speak in English which might have degraded their abilities. They were flying the F16 and using the same missiles as us. It was a very fun experience. You really got the feeling about how small the country is and how surrounded.

WC: Can't let you get away without telling us about with your son?
SC: My son ended up going into the VMI wanting to be a pilot. He went to pilot training, went through Shepard and got a fighter but at the time the air force was short a cockpit. So they were making pilots coming out of training go to a desk job for three years and he wanted to fly quickly. So he started interviewing with guard outfits and the Air force said if a guard outfit would take him he'd be out of his commitment. So flew with the New York State Guard in Syracuse. Well just so happens I went to Army War College with the guy in command of the Syracuse Guard. So we were able to do a block switch of airplanes and we were able to fly together. Also my first F-16 was tail number 008, it ended up down in Tucson and he got a chance to fly that. He's now working in the White House, but he's still in the guard, flying F16's in the DC Guard. I'm pretty proud of him.

WC: I think we're getting pretty close to the end.
SC: One last thing I want to say. I worked with NATO is Brussels, and when the Wall fell a lot of Warsaw Pact countries wanted to get into NATO. I had to go over there and tell them what the requirements were to get in. I went to these countries and I was blown away, these countries didn't want to be under the Soviet Union. We were about to nuke them and these people didn't want to be our enemies. I don't regret anything. It was great serving my country.

Picture 1: Command at Ramstein 1993.
Picture 2: Flying with son.

WC: How do you think your time with the service changed or effected your life?
SC: I've been able to work with a lot of wonderful people willing to sacrifice themselves for something bigger than them. I'm a part of a wonderful self-serving community. It's made me a more understanding person, gave me a sense of purpose and focus. It made me appreciate my family. Thinking about what my family had done, moving around 20 times. Especially my wife.