Transcription: William Pierson

Today is Monday, November 3rd, 2014. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. William Pierson. This interview is being conducted in person in the Stephen F. Austin Building, in Austin, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for our program.

William Pierson: Well it's an honor for me to be asked to do this.

Sir, the first question that I always start with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

William Pierson: OK, I'd like to back up four generations because I come from a military family, and my great grandfather was William Henry Courvoirsier, and he retired after World War I as Assistant Surgeon General of the Army, and he got his M.D. just before the Civil War broke out in 1864. He got his M.D. and when the Civil War broke out, of course he was taken into the Army and doctors were not given ranks until the Spanish American War. They just got a pay date and they advanced in pay dates, so with their contemporaries who held rank and the Spanish American War broke out in April of 1898 and ended just as quickly the same month.

Did you know him at all?

William Pierson: That's what I'm leading up to. I did. He was born in 1839, in Bermuda, and then he came to upstate New York as a teenager, and anyway as I said, he was a doctor and the first rank he got was when they gave doctors a rank. In the Civil War he was a colonel. So in a sense he entered the military as a colonel, which isn't true because he was a military doctor. At any rate, his name was William Henry Courvoirsier, and I was named after him. I'm William Courvoirsier Pierson. And his son, my maternal grandfather, was a career cavalry officer who retired at Fort Sam Houston as a regimental commander of the cavalry regiment there. Then his daughter was my mother, Phyllis Courvoirsier, who married my father, Malard Pierson, who graduated from West Point in 1920. Now we're getting down to about the time I was born. Dad graduated from West Point in 1920, and at that time all graduates of West Point went to their branch school, and at that time the field artillery branch school was at old Camp Knox, Kentucky, before it was upgraded to Fort Knox. His first duty station after an academic year at Camp Knox, Kentucky, was Fort Sam Houston, where he met my mother. Dad was in the field artillery battalion attached to I believe it was the 2nd Cavalry at Fort Sam, and dad and mother dated there and then dad was ordered to the Philippines, and it's sort of an amusing little story that my grandmother did not particularly care for my father and she didn't want my mother marrying him, so she figured when dad left for the Philippines, that was the end of that. Well, being an Army family they had been stationed all over and they had friends stationed at other Army posts, and my mother had a very dear girlhood friend who lived at Fort Riley, Kansas, and mother was ostensibly going up to Fort Riley, Kansas, which is in central Kansas, to stay with that girl and her family, and what she did was she wrote letters and predated them and they were to be mailed on specific dates back to Fort Sam Houston to my grandmother. My grandmother thought that mother was still at Fort Riley, and mother very lightly in pencil put what dates the letters were to be mailed where the stamp went over it, and then she took the train out to San Francisco where she caught – the Army had three transports at the time – the U.S. Army transporter Grant, the U.S. Army transporter Hunter Liggot, and the U.S. Army transport Leonard Wood, and they were constantly making circuits through the Pacific. They'd leave San

Francisco and go to Hawaii and then to Wake Island and Guam and then the Philippines, which at that time was in American possession, to take out the families and the personnel who were being transferred out there, and bringing back those families who were rotating home to the mainland. So anyway, mother went out to San Francisco and at San Francisco right at the port of embarkation, they had sort of a military hotel there called the Hostess House, and mother stayed at the Hostess House until the Grant came in and landed and people got off and then they started boarding. In the meantime, she ran into some – the Army was very small in those days – she ran into a couple who were going to Fort Benning, Georgia, and never dreaming for a moment they would run into my grandparents, but they did. My grandparents were on active duty at Fort Sam Houston, and this couple my mother saw and knew them from her childhood, didn't dream that this couple would stop off in San Antonio and get off there to visit friends. And one night at the officer's club at Fort Sam, they ran into my grandparents and said oh, we saw Phyllis at the Hostess House waiting to go out to the Philippines, and my grandmother said oh, you must be mistaken. It wasn't Phyllis because she's up at Fort Riley visiting I'll say the Jones', I don't know what their name was – and said no, it was Phyllis. She was going out to the Philippines to marry some gentleman, some young officer named Mallard Pierson. And my grandmother says oh my God!

How old was your mom at that time?

William Pierson: At that time, 21, you didn't come of age. 18 is legal adulthood now, and you were under your parents' control until age 21 back in those days.

Was she 21 yet?

William Pierson: No, mother was only – mother was born 1903, and this was in early 1923, she wasn't quite 21. So she was still under parental control as far as the legal aspects of it go. Then my grandparents, when she said Phyllis, she was going out to the Philippines to marry some young West Point graduate named Mallard Pierson, and my grandmother realized she'd been duped. At any rate then we come to me. I was born in the Philippines March 8th of 1926, so I will be 89 in about three and a half months. Then the scary one is the year after that, the big 90. Anyway, for all intensive purposes I'm 89 years old now, and I was born in the Philippines, and people often say to me oh, well you can't be president of the United States, and my answer is, well you're right, but you're thinking for the wrong reason. I said I'm eligible. And they say no you're not, and I say why? They say you were born in a foreign country. I say no I wasn't, I was born in the Philippines. Philippines is a foreign country. I say it is now, but it wasn't when I was born there. It was part of the U.S. Just like John McCain was born in the Panama Canal zone before Jimmy Carter gave the canal zone back -

Both your parents were American citizens.

William Pierson: Oh yeah, both my parents were natural born Americans and so am I a natural born citizen because I was born on U.S. soil in the Philippines which was American territory at the time.

Do you have any memories of the Philippines?

William Pierson: No, because I came back when I was a year and a half, two years old. My earliest memories are at Fort Sam Houston. We came back from the Philippines to Fort Sam and I remember my parents bought me a pony named Brown Boy, and I won a blue ribbon in a horse

show at the age of two and a half riding Brown Boy, which my parents and grandparents were very proud of. At any rate, in those days the Army was very small and anybody in one branch, cavalry, field or trade, knew, if they didn't personally know 'em, they knew of everybody else in that branch. I was leading up to a point here. Well anyway, we were at Fort Sam and then my dad was ordered out to Japan. We knew we were coming upon some confrontation with Japan in the western Pacific. We didn't know at that time it was necessarily going to be a war, but we knew that our interests conflicted out in the western Pacific. So dad was ordered to the embassy in Tokyo as the assistant military attaché, but his primary duty was to learn to speak Japanese because the Army knew it was going to need Japanese speaking officers, and we lived in a little village called Omoti, about 30 miles outside of Japan. At that time, Omoti was a little village. Today it's an entire prefecture because it was halfway between Tokyo and Yokohama, and the two cities have grown together now that Omoti is a prefecture about the equivalent of a county.

Do you remember living in Japan?

William Pierson: Yes I do. I remember there were only three western style houses in Omoti. A German diplomat lived in one, a Japanese medical doctor lived in the other, and we occupied the third one. Mother and dad were off on embassy functions in Tokyo almost every day and every night, and we had two ah-ma's. One of them was called Shigisan. I've forgotten the other one's name. One was supposed to be the house mate and the other was supposed to be our nanny, but they both did both jobs naturally, and when we left there, two and a half years later, Japanese was my primary language because my sister and I played with all the Japanese kids in the neighborhood, and I do remember the house was sort of flimsy by our standards, and dad could put his back up against the door jam between the living room and the hallway and shake the house. We used to get earthquakes about once a week that you could feel. Sometimes they were strong ones. But at any rate, the Japanese word for earthquake was "jushin" and dad would stand against the door jam and shake the whole house by pushing back and forth, and "jushin, jushin," and my sister and my mother and I would run out in the little front yard because that's what you did when you had an earthquake. You didn't want the house collapsing on you. And when we came back in 1931 or '32 from Japan, and Japan by the way was a closed society in those days. They didn't allow tourists in or their people out of the country except to go to universities like Oxford and UCLA and so on. Being a closed society, it was quite something for us to have the experience of living there at that time. When we came back, again, this time we were going to be at the Presidio in Monterey, California, was dad's duty station, but dad and mother took leave and we went down to Fort Sam Houston to visit my grandparents and at that time my granddad had just retired from the Army and were living in Terrell Hills just off the post at Fort Sam, and my sister who was a year and a half younger than I, spoke only Japanese. That was her only language, but I was bilingual. Japanese was my primary language, but I spoke English also because I was a year and a half older than my sister. I was four and she was two and a half. Anyway something like that. By the way, at that time the Americans in the late 20s couldn't differentiate from one Asian ethnicity to another, Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean – they were all the same, and it was before the word Chink became a pejorative term like it is today, and so the neighbors, Dorothy was going up and down on her tricycle jabbering away in Japanese because that's all she spoke, and the neighbors would call me over and say Billy, Billy, come over here and translate for this little Chink sister of yours. So I'd come over and tell them what she was saying because she jabbered away at 'em in Japanese and they didn't understand word she said. Of course at that age you pick up languages very quickly and in six months later she was speaking English. So we spent my first four years of school at the Presidio, Monterey, going to school in Pacific Grove which is sort of a suburb of Monterey so to speak. At that time, we kids on Army posts rode school buses which were big 4x4 trucks that they put

benches on either side inside and a double bench down the middle, and steps that an MP rode on on the back. We'd ride to school. That bus would come around and pick us up at our quarters on the post and take us to school. So my first four years, 1st through 4th grade were in Pacific Grove grammar school, and at that time school systems varied considerably in how advanced they are compared one state to another. Today they're pretty well standardized, and 5th grade students in Georgia get about the same thing as 5th grade students in Illinois or Wisconsin. But at that time they varied considerably, and California schools were quite far advanced from Kansas schools, so when we went from Presidio, Monterey, to Fort Riley, Kansas, which is in central Kansas, I had by the way started school at age 5 instead of 6, and I was going into the 5th grade, and when we had gotten to Junction City, I remember, I don't know why I remember this except that it was an odd name, the principal of the grammar school was named Mr. Bonecutter. He said to dad, he interviewed when we went in to register, he said to dad, in talking to your son here, he asked me some questions and I'd already had fractions and other things that the kids in Kansas didn't get until about the 6th grade, so he told dad since your son should be placed not in the 5th grade, but the 6th. And my dad said no way. Dad said my son is already a year ahead of his contemporaries as far as grade goes in school because he started at 5. I won't have him put in classes with kids two years older than him. So dad put me in the 5th grade in Junction City, which meant that I was essentially repeating what I had the year before in California schools. I was bored with it, I didn't like it, and what happened was that I was a cut-up in class, I didn't study, and I carried those habits through the rest of my life where I didn't study hard like I should all the way through high school and when I ultimately went to college -- so anyway from there on I was bored with school and I never studied. I say never, I did a very minimum amount of studying. What I'd do is slide through a semester whether it was elementary school, high school or college, by doing the bare minimum amount of studying and then when final exam week came, I'd panic and stay up until 2 or 3 a.m. trying to study for final exams. We were talking about Fort Riley, Kansas. We were at Fort Riley from 1935 to '39 which for me was age 9 to 13, and the first time I ever lived outside of government quarters in my life was dad got a tour in 1939 to the ROTC at the University of Illinois in Champagne, and it was the largest ROTC unit in the country. They had 28 regular Army officers stationed there. We lived in Champagne although most of the university was over in Urbana. As I recall, Rice Street ran north and south was the dividing line between Champagne and Urbana. We lived at 613 W. Springfield in Champagne, which is neither here nor there. I'm sort of digressing. As I said, this was the first time I ever lived in a civilian house outside of quarters, and it was the only time until I got married at age 25 until then that I had lived in a civilian house outside of a military installation. So I went to University High School which was owned and operated by the University of Illinois, and faculty members which ROTC officers were considered could go there free, and kids from in Champagne or Urbana and surrounding farms could go to, they called it Uni High, University High School, could go to Uni High, pay a tuition to go there because it was a very well thought of school, much better than a local school, public schools in Champagne and Urbana, so I went to Uni High while we were in Champagne.

Were you there when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

William Pierson: No, we were there, we went from there to the Presidio, San Francisco, where dad was in, the Army was divided into corps areas at that time. It was the 9th Corps Area headquarters. Today it's divided into Army switches, about equal to what the corps areas used to be, and dad got assigned to the Presidio, San Francisco, the 9th Corps Area headquarters, and we were living at the post at Presidio, San Francisco, and dad got orders in late November, or middle of November, anyway in the autumn of 1941, to Panama, and he was going to precede us, he was going to leave the week before Christmas and go down to Panama and as soon as he got quarters

down there in Panama Canal zone, we were going to join him. Of course we moved off the post at the Presidio into an apartment just off the main gate of Presidio, San Francisco, on December 5th, and you know what happened two days later on December 7th. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and dad's orders were immediately canceled and he got orders out in the Pacific to go on the first convoy. They had organized convoys of ships that were escorted by aircraft carriers and destroyers and cruisers to protect them from Japanese submarines, and the first convoy that was organized and ready to go, dad left on the 21st of December for the Pacific, and he spent the entire war out in the Pacific. My mother and I, sister and I were living off post in this apartment about two blocks from the main gate at the Presidio, and as I said, I had poor study habits and I wasn't doing too well in school as well as I should be. My mother's younger brother had the Chevrolet dealership in Bryan, Texas, it was Courvoisier Chevrolet, WHC Chevrolet. And oh, by the way, speaking of that, I got to back up here. It's a little disjointed, but when I was born in the Philippines on the 8th of March, 1926, a cablegram came in to San Antonio where my great grandfather and my grandparents were living saying "baby boy, William Courvoisier Pierson, born 8 March in Sternberg U.S. Army General Hospital in Manila," and my great grandfather who was a retired assistant surgeon general of the Army, and no dummy either because of his position, turned to his son – my grandfather, he was living with him at the time, and said "how in the world" – this was in the days before sonograms and there was no way to know the gender of a baby until it was born, and my great grandfather turns to his son and says "how in the dickens did they know it's a boy the day before it's born?" And my grandfather says, "dad, think a minute." He said "what's to think about? How do they know?" He says, "dad, what's that line that runs up and down through, north and south through the central Pacific Ocean?" He said "the 180th meridian." My granddad says, "it's got another name." My great grandfather slaps his forehead and says "oh yeah, international date line." I turn a year older on the 7th of March every year when I'm on this side of the international date line, but my official birthday isn't until the next day the 8th of March, but I digress. Where were we?

We were talking about World War II had started, your dad went out to the Pacific.

William Pierson: Oh yeah, so dad left on the 21st of December on the first convoy that was organized out of San Francisco, and my mother and my sister and I moved into the apartment off post, and since I wasn't studying and doing as well as I should in high school and my uncle, my mother's younger brother William Henry Courvoisier II over in Bryan said that they had a great little school there called Alan Millinger Academy, so I voluntarily, I knew – I'd always been brought up wanting to go to West Point, follow my dad to West Point, and I wasn't going to get there on my current course I was taking, so I voluntarily agreed to go down to Bryan where I'd have my aunt and uncle living in town close by and where I'd be in a military school where the environment would be that I'd have to study a little harder and the discipline would be good for me. So I went off to the second half of my junior year and my senior year at Alan Academy in Bryan which is where I ultimately graduated from high school. During World War II, if you were already 18 and still in high school, they let you graduate and you were drafted on the day you graduated. Anybody as we used to say, anybody between the ages of 18 and 47 who could see lightning and hear thunder and pass the physical exam were drafted. If you were 17 and already out of high school, which I was – I graduated at age 17 – you could enlist in the service of your choice with parental permission. So I decided I wanted to enlist in the Navy and mother and I went downtown in San Francisco to the federal building where the Navy recruiting officer was a young man named Ensign Blot, a French word not pronounced "blot" but "blo," and we wanted to enlist and get me enlisted, and he said well Mrs. Pierson, since his father's alive, we need both parents' permission. We can't just take yours. And she said, "my husband's out in the Pacific island hopping, no way we can get a hold of him for it." And so Ensign Blot says "let's

call Washington, chief of naval personnel office and see if we can get a waiver. And in those days you couldn't just dial, they didn't have direct dialing long distance, and you had to go through what they called a rate and route operator on each day because the rate and the route would vary, so we had to get the rate and the route, and the route could be something like from San Francisco to Salt Lake City, back to Phoenix, then to Chicago and then to Washington, depending what the easiest way to get the circuits was. So Ensign Blot got to the rate and route and called back and got a chief petty officer, chief of naval officer operations office and told them the story, and he had it on a little old wooden squawk box where we could all talk and hear, and the chief said well, let me get the Navy captain who is the chief of staff and we'll use the names Jones and Smith, we'll get Captain Jones and told Captain Jones the story, and he said "that sounds great, but we'll have to get Admiral Smith, the chief of naval personnel to grant the waiver. So they got Admiral Smith on and he said "absolutely, waiver granted." So mother signed the papers, I was sworn in the Navy, and -

What made you, sir, want to go in the Navy and not the Army like your forefathers?

William Pierson: I don't recall why. I don't remember the reasons, but I was 17 years old and I enlisted and went to boot camp and I was assigned to an old World War I four-stacker cruiser named the Marblehead back in the days when all cruisers were named after American cities. Of course she was named after Marblehead, Massachusetts, and the bathroom in the Navy is called the head, not the latrine, so her name was the Marblehead and we sailors aboard the Marblehead called her, excuse the expression, but the "alabaster shithouse," Marblehead. We wore hats in the winter time what we called "black flat hat" that said USS Marblehead in gold in a little ruben on the side of the hat, and the other sailors would say "oh, you're from the alabaster shithouse." That was fighting words, but with us we could call her that and it was a fine nickname for the ship. Again, I digress. So I took exams for the naval academy and I won an appointment to Annapolis, and I ended up going to the naval academy and mother wrote dad and of course he could get the letters. They'd mail out there and they'd track him down, and dad wrote me a beautiful. I remember, somewhere in all my files at home I think I've got a copy of it, but he said "dear son, we both know that you always wanted to go to West Point like I did, but I'm so proud of you that you're in the Navy and are trying to get to the naval academy, let me tell you that we're island hopping from one island to the other until we get it secured, and living in a pup tent in the sand with all the sand fleas and sand in my K-rations and all that, he said we look forward to getting aboard a Navy ship to spend three to six days going to the next island, and said sleeping with clean sheets and taking clean showers and eating in the air conditioned ward room, having hot meals with ice cream for dessert, he said believe me son, you made the right choice. He said the Navy takes care of its own, and I think you made the right choice going in the Navy. I thought it was a very nice thing of dad to say because we'd been Army all the way back four generations back, so I won appointment to the naval academy, and when I graduated from the naval academy in 1948, I went straight to flight training and my first two airplanes were the Corsair, the old F4U inverted gold wing Corsair and then the Sky Raider AD, and then I got into jets and never looked back. I was a flight instructor for three years down at Navy Chase Field at Beeville, Texas, which is closed now, but it was the Navy jet fighter school, and I was a jet flight instructor down there three years from '54 to '57. But in the meantime, backing up a little bit, I made five deployments to the Mediterranean with the 6th Fleet after I got my wings in January 1950, and I had two tours out in Korea. My first combat tour out in Korea was aboard the USS Leyte, and my second tour was aboard the USS Turawa in '73 and '74 as the Korean War was winding down. I did get ashore several times in Korea, had to land ashore and in the late November of 1950, we didn't know – let me back up. We were bombing the Yellow River bridges near the mouth of the Yellow River which empties into the Yellow Sea in North Korea,

and we were bombing those bridges to keep the Chinese Communist army from coming across. There were two bridges there and we bombed them every day for about 12-13 days, and of course if you try to bomb, we were not supposed to violate the international boundary which is in the middle of the Yellow River, separating North Korea from Communist China. But our squadron skipper, Commander Ralph Bagwell, said there's only one way we can do that and that's to bomb down the length of the river and we're going to have to fly north and then split S, roll over on your back and bomb the length of the river to hit those bridges. You're more accurate doing it that way. And our squadron of 16, I was a young ensign and I was the 16th man in this 16-plane echelon, echelon meaning the squadron leader was the first airplane and we were just back at an angle, 45 degree angle, and he split S'd just after he crossed the Yellow River, and by the time I made my split S, I was about 15-20 miles inside Communist China and flack hitting us. They had 5-inch anti-aircraft with radar proximity fuses that would explode the shell when it got within, close enough to an airplane to hit it, and we were trying to keep our little pipper's we called it, the little red reflection up in the windshield with, target with a point in the middle for the bull's eye, and trying to keep that pipper, the middle of the target on the bridge, with these 5-inch shells going off, was poom-poom, back and forth – but anyway, we all got back to the carrier with little holes in our airplane from those proximity fuses which fortunately, none of the airplanes in our squadron, some of a couple of the other carriers were shot down, but nobody in our squadron was.

What type of plane were you flying?

William Pierson: I was flying an AD at that time, Sky Rader, prop flop airplane, and as I said, fortunately we just had holes in the metal, and just patched up these little holes from shrapnel on the side of the airplane, and the airplane was back in service the next day. So this went on for a little less than two weeks, and what we didn't know was that over a million, close to two million Chinese Communists had already crossed those bridges and had gotten up to the Yellow River, excuse me, up to the Chochin reservoir which is only about 200 miles southeast of where the bridges were, and as you know it was one hell of a battle where the 1st Marine Division and the 7th Army Division had to fight their way back down from the reservoir in that old dirt, S-turn highway that went down to Hamhung and Hungnam, and we covered that evacuation the whole way with close air support because the Chinese Communist troops were all over there trying to destroy the Army 7th Division and the 1st Marine Division, and the two ports down at the base of that on the Sea of Japan were Hamhung and Hungnam and we covered that until Christmas Day of 1950. And as a slight aside, when Yuansan was about to be overrun by the Chinese Communists and North Korean Communist Army, they were already at the gates above the harbor and I went in an AD that had passenger capability where inside the fuselage there were three seats back in there, and I landed at Yuansan and the Marine troops hastened as happily as they could came down to the runway there at Yuansan and hopped in and strapped themselves in and I took off as the North Korean Army was coming down the hill and got those people out safely back to the carrier. We returned after let's see, Christmas Day was the last day of the evacuation down at Hamhung and Hungnam, and I had a Naval academy classmate named Leroy Howard who was an Oklahoman and he had seen an article – they were dropping stars and stripes to the troops and he was up at the reservoir and they mentioned in an article there, our squadron VA-35 was supporting the troops up at the reservoir, and they mentioned the names of two or three of us, and somehow or other my name was in there, and Leroy sent a message out that, Turawa, thanking us for that, and I sent a message back, you thanking us? Hell, you're the one going through hell, we ought to thank you for your – and he ended up wounded and in the hospital in Yokoska, Japan, and when we went in to Yokoska, I went over to the hospital to visit him. Unfortunately Leroy died about four or five years ago. He's no longer with us. But he had

retired home to Oklahoma. After my second tour in Korea, I said I was stationed down at Beeville, Texas, and for three years as a Navy jet flight instructor, and when that tour was up, I was sent out to a staff in Hawaii that was called the Hawaiian Sea Frontier Staff, and I was a Navy full lieutenant which is the equivalent of a captain in the Air Force or Army. I was going to what they called a two-year split tour sea duty. I was coming from shore duty. It was a four-year split tour. I would get two years on the Hawaiian Sea Frontier Staff, which had responsibility for operational control and search and rescue incidents in the entire Pacific Ocean from the North Pole to the South Pole, which is a large expanse, and we would coordinate a civilian steamer had somebody aboard with acute appendicitis, we would get the nearest Navy ship to rendezvous, we'd give them the coordinates for a rendezvous and head toward each other so that they could, say an aircraft carrier be dispatched in or a cruiser or a battleship which had surgeons on board to perform the operation and so on, that type of thing. Also all ships in the ocean in the Pacific, every six hours made weather reports so that we could plot a world weather map and we did that, took the weather reports and their positions, and did the plotting of that. We had a large control center and I was a senior watch officer out there in the Hawaiian Sea Frontier Staff, and I sat up on sort of a balcony with a chief petty officer and we had 28 people in the watch section and big status boards across the other side of the center, huge status boards with a map of the Pacific Ocean showing the names of all the Navy ships and where they were, and the civilian ships that were sending their every six-hour weather reports. At the end of that two-year tour, I was going as a ship's company officer aboard an aircraft carrier most likely as a flight deck officer, and I was coming up for lieutenant commander, and I loved to fly and it looked like it would be my last cockpit assignment because once I made lieutenant commander in two years hence, I'd be lucky to get another cockpit assignment and so I had a chance to transfer into the Air Force and keep flying, and I transferred into the Air Force from Navy lieutenant to Air Force captain.

What year was this?

William Pierson: This was 1959, July 1st, 1959 I transferred to the Air Force as a captain and I was coming into the zone for major and I made major about five months later, and I thought I was going to go into the F4 Phantom, was a new fighter in the inventory. It was the hottest thing we had, a supersonic fighter, and I thought surely I'd get assigned to F4 squadron being a fighter pilot. Well, little naïve me. At that time, the Air Force had Tactical Air Command which had all the fighters that fought the war with another country's land war, and the Air Defense Command which was about the same size as the Tactical Air Command, had the sole mission of intercepting Russian bombers coming over the pole through Canada and so on, and the Air Defense Command at that time, the Russian bomber threat had decreased to where they had just stood the Air Defense Command down and decommissioned it so there were 1700 Air Defense Command pilots who wanted to get into the F4 program also, and there weren't that many slots. Most of them were funneled into the B-47 aircraft commander program and that's where I ended up going into was B-47, which was the big six-engine bomber, the predecessor of the B-52, and I ended up as a B-47 aircraft commander down in McDill Air Force Base in Florida. The term we called it "reflex" – we'd reflex over to North Africa every quarter for three weeks of nuclear alert, and stand our nuclear alert over there. Our targets were all needless to say in what was then the Soviet Union, not just Russia, but all of those other Soviet republics. What our profile of our missions consisted of, we'd take off from Ben Greer Air Base which is down in Marrakesh, but they call that Marakish – which is down in the desert at the foot of the Atlas Mountains on the edge of the Sahara, Nuasur Air Base which is at Casablanca and we'd spend three weeks once a quarter over there on nuclear alert, and the profile of the mission was we'd take off when the bell rang, and we'd climb to altitude and when we got over the middle of the

Mediterranean Sea, we would meet tanker planes, either C-97's or C-135's, and refuel to full load which we'd need, and then we'd coast in on Romania and get down on the deck as we said at 500 knots as we pilots who call it balls to the wall with all six engines at 100 percent power. You use percentage of rpm, talking about power in a jet engine, and we'd go to 100 percent where normally you cruise at about 80 percent. So anyhow we'd get right down on the deck through Romania and Bulgaria and when we got to the Soviet border, our targets were usually fairly close to the border with the eastern European countries, and we'd pop up to altitude and we'd carry four mark 28 weapons which were a nuclear weapon that was a very powerful weapon, and we'd pop up to about 25,000 feet as quickly as we could, and the four different targets we had were usually Soviet air force bases, sometimes army installations, other installations, and we'd release each of our four nuclear bombs and then hightail it out and get down on the deck again, where the Soviet radar couldn't pick us up and we'd head for our recovery bases. Our recovery base was Stavangar, Norway, which was a suicide thing. Even if we made it out of the Soviet Union, it was in a fjord and it was a deep fjord and it was a short runway that a B-47 couldn't possibly land on, but that was our recovery base. Fortunately the alarm never went off for a nuclear war. After my tour of McDill, let's see where did I go – from McDill AFB in Tampa, I ended up in the Pentagon for eight years. My first four years was on what we call the Air Staff headquarters, U.S. Air Force, and future weapons planning shop where we were trying to get at that time we were trying to get the space mission for the U.S. Air Force and President Eisenhower decided that space would be for peaceful purposes only. We would not have a military mission. We wanted to commission SAC – the Air Force Aerospace Command – and as I said, Eisenhower decided space would be for peaceful purposes, and we weren't going to put nuclear weapons in orbit or anything like that. So those plans were canceled, but I stayed in the future weapons branch where we planned for whatever weapons and aircraft the Air Force should have in the future.

What did you think of being at the Pentagon for eight years?

William Pierson: Well I did four years on the Air Staff doing that, and then I ended up in the opposite secondary defense for four years.

Who was the secretary of defense at that time?

William Pierson: McNamara, whoever was secretary of defense, Melvin Laird – after McNamara, Mel Laird.

So that was the Nixon administration.

William Pierson: Yeah, and I was working for the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs and I was preparing and helping approve any and all speeches that the Pentagon Air Force and opposite secretary – well no, because I was in the opposite secretary of defense – it was for all services – any senior officer or assistant secretary of defense and even congressmen would submit their speeches if they touched on military matters to us for clearance to make sure that they weren't revealing any military secrets and that they were correct in what they were saying on their speeches. So that was my job and future weapons planning in the opposite assistant secretary of defense. I retired out of that job on September 1st, 1974, which two months ago – it doesn't seem like 40 years, it seems like yesterday. As I said, I moved to Austin to get my PhD in international finance and international business here and I taught at UT for eight years, not as a professor but as a teaching assistant, and instructor.

When you left the military, what rank did you retire with?

William Pierson: I should've retired as an O6 full colonel, but I had a habit of not being diplomatic with my senior officers and telling them when they were wrong, when if I'd been diplomatic and acted like I was trying to protect them from something, I had a smart ass attitude of you're wrong colonel, or you're wrong general, it should be this. Not quite that bad, but it came across as being not respecting their seniority and their intelligence, and because I was too outspoken with senior officers, I did not make full colonel. I retired as a lieutenant colonel, like Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters you see on CNN. He's a spokesman on Fox News and some -

Well sir, I really appreciate you coming in to share your memories with us, and I don't know if I told you beforehand, but here at the Land Office we have archives that go back to the 1700s. We have the land grant that belonged to David Crockett's widow when he was killed at The Alamo, and we have the Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the original Anglo settlers, so our goal is to take this interview and save it for posterity, and so hopefully hundreds of years from now, people can listen to it and study it. With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview decades from now?

William Pierson: Well, I want to pay tribute to my current wife. I'm married to an English woman, and I spent 17 consecutive summers from May 1st until after Labor Day in England at what they call August Bank Holiday which is the last Monday in August, and then Labor Day is when school starts back here in the States a week later, so I would always leave after Bank Holiday, my 17 consecutive summers I spent in London, and get back here right after August Bank Holiday when next Monday was Labor Day here so I'd be ready for school when it started at the University of Texas, and the reason I'm saying this is I am currently married to a wonderful English woman. Her maiden name was Muriel Syes, and I met her, I didn't meet her over in England. She's from Manchester, and I met her here in Austin. She was acting in a play at Zach Scott Theater called A Murderess, announced and I saw in the little program or play bill, whatever they call it, it said that she was an Air Force wife for 28 years. So I found her in the phone book, called her, she lived near me, not more than a half a mile away from me over in north Austin. At that time I lived in Quail Creek, and I called her on the phone and she always the answers the phone – oh by the way she's an identical twin, and her name is Muriel, but she's called Lulu, and the Lulu comes from the fact that when they were little toddlers learning to speak about two and a half years old, Marjorie could not say Muriel. And that sounded like Lulu to the family, so she goes by Lulu to close friends and family, and by the name Muriel to people outside the family or aren't real close friends. The British English is a little bit different from American English, a lot of expressions are different, and a beautiful expression, the word bossy boots, and most wives are bossy boots but particularly British women. They're used to ruling the roost, so I lovingly call her a bossy boots, but she's a great lady and I wanted to pay tribute to her as I said, I didn't meet her over there. I met her when she was – I called on the telephone and she answered, she always answers the phone "hello, Muriel." And I says is this Muriel Underwood? And she said yes it is. I said I want to tell you I thoroughly enjoyed seeing you at the Zach Scott Theater in a Murderess and I thought you were marvelous. And she said well thank you so much and what's your name? I said it's Rodney Smithhesterston. And she said well that's very nice of you. I said would it be possible for us to get together socially? And she said well I think it might be possible. And I started laughing and she said what are you laughing at? And I said well, I'm a fraud. She said what happened to your English accent? I said that's what I mean, I'm a fraud. I'm not English. And she said well you had me fooled. And I said can we get together socially? And she said well that would be nice. So she told these neighbors across the street, Bobby and Carol Bigger, that I was coming to take her to a Halloween party at

her daughter's house which is about eight blocks away on Halloween, and they said oh my God Muriel, you don't know anything about him. Are you still taping this?

No, I'm still recording.

William Pierson: Oh, OK. You don't know anything about him, he could be a murderer or a rapist, so unbeknownst to me, they lived directly across the street from her. When I pulled my car into her driveway, they were behind the curtains and Carol was taking down my license number and reading it to Bobby and he was writing it on a tablet as they peeked through the curtains, and they told her to be sure and call them as soon as she got over to Kimberley's house and that she got there safely. Of course we got there five minutes later and called the Bigger's and he's legitimate and I'm here at Kim's house. And we started dating and we're both coming out of contentious divorces, fairly contentious divorces and were sort of walking on eggshells. And we dated for six years. We traveled together to England two or three times, on my stomping grounds, and when we were up in Manchester visiting her family, we were on her stomping grounds. We went out to visit my sister in California and things like that. After six years we decided that it was safe enough to get married and we've been married now since my dad died at age 90 in '88. So we've been married since '88 and we'll be coming up on our 30th anniversary in four years.

That's great. Well again sir, I really appreciate it. Thank you for your time.

William Pierson: I really enjoyed talking to you. If I sound a little bragga-docio, I apologize, but I've had what I think is a very interesting life and if I die tonight of a heart attack in my sleep, I have no regrets. I've had a fantastic life.

That's great.

[End of recording]