

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS  
Oral History Interview with Ronald Holmes  
Nike Ajax Missiles  
1955-58  
May 13, 2005  
Interviewed by Mary Rasa, NPS  
Transcribed by Mary Rasa, 2010



Memorial for soldiers and civilian killed in Nike Missile explosion in Middletown, New Jersey. This image is from its dedication at the Middletown site. Once the site closed in 1963 the monument was moved to Highlands and then in 1974 it was moved to its current location in Guardian Park, Fort Hancock.

Photo courtesy U.S. Army

Editor's notes in parenthesis ( )

MR: Today is (May) Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, 2005. My name is Mary Rasa, Sandy Hook Museum Curator and I am going to do an oral history interview. Please state your full name.

RH: Ronald Henry Holmes.

MR: Please spell your last name.

RH: H-O-L-M-E-S.

MR: Okay. When and where were you born?

RH: April 25, 1934 in New Brighton, Pennsylvania.

MR: What schools did you attend?

RH: I graduated from Beaver Falls High School. I also graduated from Valparaiso Technical Institute in Valparaiso, Indiana and I attended some classes at Syracuse University. That was after I got out of the military.

MR: Did your Father or Grandfather serve in the military?

RH: No. They did not. My Great-Grandfather fought in the Civil War. Outside of that, I had a couple of uncles who served in the Second World War.

MR: What years did you serve?

RH: From April '55 to April '58.

MR: Okay. How did you end up getting, were you drafted?

RH: No. What happened is that when I got out of Val Po Tech I started looking for a job. I got a job at the instrument department of U. S. Steel in Gary, Indiana. I was living by myself out there and hated it. I came back home to Pennsylvania and absolutely could not get a job. Only because I took several tests and people would say, "We'd be glad to hire you, but you're facing the military." So, I went down and tried to volunteer for the draft. And they said, "Well, it'll be a couple of years before we take you." So with that, at that time you could request a school if you went in the military. So, I went down to the recruiting office and I requested Electronic Material Maintenance School. And got a letter from the Adjacent General in D.C. stating that they had an opening in that school. So, I enlisted for three years.

MR: And what year did you graduate from school?

RH: I graduated in '52 from high school and I graduated in '54 from Valpo Tech. I didn't attend Syracuse until after the military.

MR: Okay. So what was your first assignment? Where was the school located?

RH: Well, I went to Missile School at Fort Bliss. And originally, that was a mess up from beginning to end. They really tried to force me to go to OCS (Officer Candidate School). Three times they tried to force me and I said, "No. I don't want it." Well, so at the end of basic training, everybody else got two weeks leave, I got three days. Because they said, "You are going to have to report at Fort Bliss at a certain day for the school." So I said, "Fine I'll take the three days." And that's what I did. Well, I got down to Bliss and they said, "Well, you've been to tech school already. We are just going to skip you

through the basic electronics course. So, it didn't make a darn bit of difference when I showed up. So, I was down at Bliss for almost a year.

MR: And you chose, you didn't want to be an officer?

RH: No. I had no desire to be an officer.

MR: What was the, what would have been different?

RH: I had a hang up about the military and being an officer over other people. I didn't want the responsibility for looking out for other people. And as it turns out, what do they do, they start sticking stripes on your sleeve anyhow, so by, you know, really no choice you end up having responsibility. Not for as many people as an officer may have, but here again as a sergeant you are faced with second lieutenants and so on and they don't know what they are doing half the time. By the way I say this, my son just retired from the military as a lieutenant colonel so...

MR: He chose a different route. (laughter)

RH: Yeah. But I really should have done it. When I got out, they offered me all kinds of, they even offered me West Point Proprietary School when I was getting out. Of course, they would give almost anything to have you re-up. They offered me a fifth stripe. They offered me West Point Proprietary which would have hopefully led to West Point. The one thing that they didn't offer me and I may have taken was warrant officer. Now, my wife as I said worked for the Ordnance Department at Fort Tilden. And she said, "There's no way we are getting married if you are staying in the military." So, I didn't really push it for that one reason.

MR: Okay. So how long were you at Fort Bliss?

RH: About a year approximately. Not quite a year. I think I went down, let me see like in June. Left the following April.

MR: And what was your training like?

RH: It was good. The student detachment was great because the barracks were great. And here again you carried a Class A pass and it was just a case of going to school. Getting up in the morning, you had to march to school of course and so on. Then after school we went over to the second missile brigade and I stayed there for a few weeks while we trained the crews and so on. We brought part of the crew with us north when we moved into Tilden. We had all the maintenance personnel and most of the officers. Well, no we didn't. I think we picked up three officers, two officers when we came up to Tilden.

MR: Now was this '56 by this point in time.

RH: No. No. This was in, it would have been in the beginning of '54 in like June. June of '54 into April of '55. Of course, in the end we went up to Red Canyon Range Camp to fire (missiles) which was a great experience. I say that with parenthesis on it. I didn't mind it though like I said.

MR: So were you opening Fort Tilden with the Ajax?

RH: No. There were two permanent batteries there. The idea was went into the 737<sup>th</sup> Missile Battalion. And they were preparing the site in Jersey. It wasn't ready yet. And it took almost a year to get it ready. At that time, they split. There was another training battery there. They went up to Tappan Zee, I don't know, with the 737<sup>th</sup>. We came down with the 526<sup>th</sup>. Some of the officers, I know our executive officer went up with the 737<sup>th</sup>. And we picked up some other officers when we came down here.

MR: So, there was already a permanent battery at Fort Tilden?

RH: There were two. I think there were two batteries at that time. I think it was the 505<sup>th</sup> Missile Battalion that had two batteries. Now we picked up, part of the guys that we picked up, the 737<sup>th</sup> had been a 90mm gun battery (anti-aircraft guns).

MR: Right.

RH: So, a lot of these guys had been in the gun battery. What we did was bring up all maintenance personnel and some officers and some people that were trained on the equipment. And we spent that year training the people that had come in from the gun battery and so on.

MR: So were there still 90mm's around?

RH: Not at that point in time. They were gone.

MR: And then at what point in time, so then you met your Wife.

RH: Yeah. Well, I was up there quite a while before I met her.

MR: Okay.

RH: I started turning in work orders from the launcher platoon and of course once I started going with her the guys in the IFC (integrated fire control) work area left their work orders there too. So, I'd take them all over. They'd just leave them at the supply room and everyday I would pick up the work orders and take them, it was across the street, the Ordnance Supply. And that's how I met her. And that's how we finally started going out. The fact of the matter is she wouldn't go out with me because I was a G.I.

MR: Oh.

RH: But I got pretty friendly. We had company reps from Western Electric and Douglas Aircraft. And I got to know them pretty well 'cause working on missiles and so on. So, I told them, they worked over in the same building, so I said, "Why don't you guys put a good word in for me." So, they went over and told her, "He's a good guy. You ought to go out with him." So, she finally did.

MR: So, when were you transferred down to Fort Hancock?

RH: In April of '57. Well, we went to Middletown (NY-53).

MR: Oh, okay.

RH: We, they used to exchange missiles. They pull all, exchange some of the older missiles. After a missile was on site for a while they'd pull them out and send them down to, it might have been McGregor Range at that point in time. I think they had closed Red Canyon Range Camp. And they used to pull in all the maintenance personnel from all the batteries in Fort Hancock to change out the missiles that they had down here. So, I got pulled in on that occasionally. And that was the case of where you were given the work in either the area where they were de-fueling or de-war heading. I still have problems placing where the assembly was here. I looked on, originally I thought it was that side of Fort Hancock but I don't think so. I think it was over here now that I looked at a layout. But that's where I worked in the assembly building where they would bring the missiles in once they had been deactivated, de-fueled. Then they would take the fins off of them and they would put them in the shipping tubs.

MR: Now who would do the de-fueling?

RH: Other maintenance personnel when you came here, like I say they brought everybody, the assembly crews from all the batteries in. As I say, there were no set hours. You worked as long as you felt you could work and then we went up to the barracks. And I told you about the U shaped one?

MR: Barracks 74.

RH: And they had blankets over the windows and they had a guy there to check you in and check you out when you went in, I mean you were assigned a bunk. When you got tired you went up and went to bed and when you got up you went back to work.

MR: Now when you were in the barracks was it just one big room?

RH: Mmmhmm. Yeah.

MR: And just a lot of cots.

RH: Yeah. And the only real, we really did put in a lot of time. I make it sound like you worked as long as you wanted to but it would turn out that you worked 12-14 hours at a crack. I remember that in between receiving deactivated missiles that I would crawl up on a work bench and go to sleep until the next missiles came in.

MR: So, where were, were they trucking them?

RH: Yeah. Truck them. They would, you know, I don't know if you've ever seen the shipping tubs or not.

MR: Yeah, they are like tubes.

RH: Big white tubes and they'd stack these on a semi. They took them down to, I think McGregor or Canyon and would fire them. When we went up to fire as a student battery, we fired two missiles. The first missile was assembled by a previous battery, assembly crew from a previous battery. And that was a used missile. One that had been on site. The next missile we assembled and that was a new missile. And then we assembled another missile which had come from site and left that one for one of the following batteries. The reason they did that was so when you went to Red Canyon Range Camp you would fire in a couple of days. (You) Didn't have to assemble a missile.

MR: Right.

RH: You would fire the one that somebody else had assembled. Well, the problem with that is that they had been on site and the first missile that we fired broke up, well, about three quarters of the way to target. Luckily, not luckily, but the one that we assembled we had a pretty good, we had a missed distance of 44 feet, which was at that time the closest distance for a student battery.

MR: Now when you are talking about the test, you would be firing at a drone?

RH: You could either fire at a drone or... We fired at drones. You could also fire at jet aircraft and they would set an offset. I don't remember what it was, 1200 mils into the acquisition radar. So, that when the target was acquired you were actually 1200 mils off.

MR: So it would be a piloted plane.

RH: It would be a piloted plane but you would be firing way behind. But all the instruments in the battery outside of the target, Acquisition Radar, the Target Tracking (TTR) and the Missile Tracking Radar (MTR) would have that 1200 mil offset in it also. So, it would appear to them that you were firing at a live target.

MR: Right.

RH: The only funny thing that I heard about that was that one battery forgot to put in the offset. And the aircraft started coming in and two of the maintenance guys got to

questioning each other and they realized that they hadn't put the offset in. So they did a cease fire right away.

MR: Right.

RH: And they requested that the pilot do another pass.

MR: He didn't want to. (laughter)

RH: He wouldn't do it. He said, "My orders called for one pass and you just had it".

MR: That's understandable. So how were the drone operated, by radio control?

RH: Yes. Radio controlled aircraft.

MR: And was it actually a real plane? What type was it?

RH: I can't. I didn't fool with those at all, but they had probably a six, eight foot wingspan on them. Enough so you could pick them up on radar. And they had a parachute that you would pop if you shot them down.

MR: Oh okay.

RH: So that you could retrieve. Or if you didn't, if you missed they would pop the chute. They could retrieve the drone. I don't know if you've ever talked about Red Canyon Range Camp to anybody. They had a donkey down there. They called him, they called him Nike I think. Then they started as the batteries came through they started giving him beer. I truly think that donkey became an alcoholic. (laughter) It would follow you around looking for beer.

MR: Well, who took care of him?

RH: Just the guys that passed through there. They had some permanent party there.

MR: Oh okay.

RH: The nice thing about Red Canyon Range Camp was that when you took a shower, you didn't have hot or cold you had one faucet. So if you took it in the morning it was boiling hot and if you tried to take it in the evening it was freezing cold. So everybody would try to come in at noon time and try to take a shower.

MR: Was it, you were basically in the desert, was it really hot there?

RH: It was really dusty and dirty. And of course you couldn't take any flammables out on the firing range. You had a box you had to dump everything in. So, I got in the habit of chewing tobacco. That was not good.

MR: Well everybody smoked back then.

RH: Oh yeah. But not chewing. And we had of course hot missiles sitting out in the desert so at night you had to have somebody on more or less guard duty. It wasn't guard duty as you know it. They had a shack and you'd go out there. A couple of guys would go out there and sleep every night. Just be around the missiles. That was a nice experience. Sleeping out in the middle of the desert with coyotes howling.

MR: Did you ever get close to one?

RH: Not really.

MR: Can you explain a little bit about the Ajax and the type of fuel that was in it?

RH: Ajax had three fuels really. They had red fuming nitric acid (RFNA) and JP4. And then they had a starter fluid. Now in the beginning it was aniline. I think they change it later because having the aniline was particularly dangerous because apparently it could build up in your system. So as maintenance personnel I had to take a blood test every month and a chest x-ray every six months because of the aniline poisoning. But here again in the military and all its wiseness, once the missile got on the launchers, I didn't have, you know, I didn't have much more to do other than the electronic checkout once a month. And the guys who were the pit rats, the guys who worked in the pits actually did aniline. And aniline was actually just a large syringe that they put in. It was a started fluid to start the sustainer engine. And the way it worked, they had a devise they called a basketball. It was a stainless steel ball about the size of a basketball. And it was full of high pressure air. When the booster separates from the missile, there's a quarter inch rod that connects from the booster to the missile. As the booster falls away it pulls this rod and starts the sustainer motor. Well, it starts it by as it pulls the rod it activates the air in this basketball. And there are partitions in the fuel lines and what it does it shoves this high pressure air through the fuel lines first and blows all these little partitions out. So that then the fuels mix.

MR: Right.

RH: And when the JP 4 and the nitric acid mix, it's very volatile. It starts to burn. That's why they have the starter fluid in there too. It's even more volatile and it has a little chamber between a couple of partitions that gets to the sustainer motor first.

MR: And what's the type of protection you wore while you were fueling?

RH: While you were fueling, you had complete rubberized suits. Boots, pants, jackets, hoods, gloves, mainly because of the acid. In fact, we had a slight accident one time when we refueled a missile. Cochran, one of the guys that out there on the headstone, he was a good guy, in fact, you are the one that hooked me up with his family and I've emailed them a couple of things. But anyway they come down off the fueling trailer and



I was acting safety officer during that fueling. And they, I don't know why, they had a neoprene plug that you plugged the filler areas after you put in the fuel and nitric acid and the one on the acid blew out. And we started losing acid down on the side of the motor well. And I'm jumping up and down saying, "Yeah, we are taking all the paint off the missile." Well, he jumped up there and just grabbed. You had a tool that you used to insert it. And he jumped up and just grabbed the thing with his bare hands and inserted it. It gave him a little bit of an acid burn on his hand. The funny thing that happened at Tilden, you talk about stories is the fact that while we were at Tilden we had our missiles above ground because we were a training battery. And two of the guys, we had blankets that went over them. And they had a battery in it. The blanket was a warming affair to keep the missile warm and we were right next to the ocean. So, they were putting the blanket on the missile and these are pretty tight fitting. They fit around the fins and everything. And they got a buckle caught between the aluminum rod that ran from the booster to the missile. Well, when the missile was on the launcher, if that rod was pulled, that high pressure air was dumped straight over board instead of dumping back through the fuel lines. Well, they caught a buckle on that rod, the two of them, and they just jerked the living heck out of it. Well, when they did that they pulled a rod and that air came rushing out. They thought the missile was going off. My god, those guys hit the ground running. I'll tell you. They were really white when the thing happened. Because I was standing there with the hydraulic maintenance man and one of the other sergeants and I knew exactly what happened as soon as it happened. But it was funny standing back there watching them.

MR: So, you worked at the Middletown site. That has several different names.

RH: Yeah.

MR: I've heard it called Belford, Leonardo.

RH: Belford, Leonardo. We called it the Middletown when we were there.

MR: Okay.

RH: I've been by that site two or three years ago. Of course the houses, there are houses where the launcher area used to be. And I don't know. I had talked to one of the park rangers here the last time. That was before you were here. And they said they weren't quite sure where the IFC area is.

MR: Well, that was, they said Chapel Hill.

RH: It was up, if you came out and crossed the railroad tracks. There was two roads that ran down, the military and the civilian highway.

MR: Right.

RH: We went down that military road a ways and then up over the hill. Now I stayed, that's the barracks that I was in.

MR: Okay. So, you lived up there.

RH: What happened was the barracks had I don't know how many rooms. Four or five rooms that ended in a partitioned off area with a little lobby and so on. It was really for officers. But we only had one single officer. So he stayed at the BOQ (Bachelor Officers' Quarters) at Fort Monmouth.

MR: Okay.

RH: So they gave all those rooms to the first three graders. So, on a site alert when you called out hot battery, I really had nothing to do because I was assembly and maintenance unless something went wrong. So, I stayed up on the hill, not in the Launcher Area. Of course when they had a problem they'd have to come up and get me out of the sack. 'Cause we had, I could never forget the night we had, we were a hot battery (and it was) snowing and raining and cold and it was like January or February. They couldn't get one missile down. They had raised them and they couldn't get it down. So, they got me and I came down and well, I had just found out that there was a down limit switch on a missile rail when it goes down. When it comes up it is activated. When it goes down of course it breaks the switch. And it had frozen and I had tracked it down. I had tracked it down through the cable blocks and so on and found what it was and I said to the battery commander who happened to be standing there. I said, "Well, Lieutenant, I said, look." I said, "I can get this thing up and down for you so why don't you just let me get it down and we'll wait until the morning to..." And he wasn't going to have any of that. I didn't figure he would so, I asked him to leave somebody to work with me to correct that.

MR: So, how long were you at the Middletown site?

RH: About a year.

MR: And would you like to talk about the accident and what had happened?

RH: Well, I don't.

MR: I know you weren't there.

RH: I wasn't there. It still bothers me a lot because if you look at that headstone the first name would have been mine. That was my replacement. And then there was Sergeant Mould, Cochran and Berry. Now Berry was the hydraulic maintenance man. He was a black kid. And the other ones I remember but they came on board late. They were only working around there a month or so before I got out. Now, I got out and I went across. I stayed over on the New York side because I was going to get married. I got out on 11-15 and was going to get married on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

MR: This was '58.

RH: Yeah. So what happened, I was driving down to pick my wife up from work. She still worked at Ordnance. And I saw that cloud and I knew just what it was across the Bay I saw that cloud and said, "By god, that is right where Middletown is." So then I found out that it was Middletown. I drove, I went down a couple of days later. The Sergeant that had the A pit, Sergeant Richter, who roomed with me up in the barracks for a while they put us both together. He later brought his wife and moved offsite. So I knew him quite well and I talked to him about it. And he was telling me, you know, the fuel and everything came pouring down the elevator cables, there are cables that hang under the elevator. And he said that the fire was coming down into the pit. And he got everybody into the crew room which is a blast proof room.

MR: Was that down in the pit?

RH: Yeah. You know where the console is.

MR: So there were people right underneath them then?

RH: Yeah, well he got them all into that crew room there. Of course, they said they were afraid to come out. There's a hatch, an escape hatch that you can use that comes up on a ladder up out of there. He said they waited until somebody started pounding on that escape hatch up there to come out. He said it was really, really scary.

MR: And there were eight missiles above ground at the time?

RH: I think there might have been twelve.

MR: Oh wow.

RH: The ones in the furthest pit, the C pit, they got back down. There were 8, they had more than four above ground on A pit. Those all went. And then two or three of the ones went in B pit too. And I don't understand why they had all those missiles above ground. They were working on them.

MR: Well, that was one of the things that from then on they only had one or two above.

RH: We weren't supposed to have it then.

MR: So it was a regulation then too.

RH: You often think that if I were there had I done anything differently. And I don't know that I would have because the guys from Ordnance were there and you would usually listen to them. They would say, "This is what we are going to do." And you would say, "Okay fine." As I say I was pretty good friends with Sergeant Mould. That was when he came on board we had a Sgt. Swank who was a master sergeant. They tried

to court-martial him. For, we used to have to turn in a report everyday called a SOD report. What that stood for I don't know. But anyway it was a report that gave the condition for all the missiles and everything. They did a site alert check on us and they found out that there were two missiles down that wasn't on the report. Now, so they decide, you know, the military in there and all their wisdom that they are going to hang somebody. So they went after Swank. Now Swank was, he and I had the same MOS (Military Occupational Specialty). We did the same job.

MR: Right.

RH: But he was the more maintenance on the missiles that were in the pits. I was mainly assembly but during site alerts and so on, you had to have somebody on site. And since he was married and lived off site he would come to me and say, "Are you going to be here tonight?" And I'd say, "Yeah go ahead take off." So, I pulled a lot of his duties that would have been his had he been on site.

MR: Right.

RH: But anyway. He did a lot for me. He was kind of a mentor to me. I'm sure that he helped me get my stripes and so on. Now, that's funny. There's a funny story there too. But anyway, they tried to they had an Article 32 down here for Swank and I was a witness.

MR: At Fort Hancock or Fort Monmouth?

RH: At Fort Hancock here at Battalion. And I was a witness at that. Well, that got him off. But I think they were going after the Warrant Officer then, Mr. Thomas, but he resigned before they could start back up the ladder. Things kind of dropped. Well, I forget the story I was going to tell you.

MR: Was that when you were getting your promotion?

RH: Oh, when I was supposed to make sergeant. Swank had come to me, you know, he said, "You're on the promotion list." So that morning I got up. Pulled out a brand new fatigue shirt, no stripes, clean sleeves. I go down to the launcher area and who showed up but the battalion commander. And I'm standing there. There were four or five of us standing there talking. And I see him keep looking at my nametag. Finally when we broke up and went to leave he says, "You are Holmes aren't you?" And I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Where's your stripes?" I said, "Well sir, as you can see, it's a brand new fatigue shirt. I got up this morning, didn't have a clean one with stripes on and I just pulled this one out of the drawer and put it on." And he said, "Oh. I thought maybe you were anticipating something." (laughter) He knew exactly what the story was.

MR: So when you left the service you were a sergeant?

RH: Yeah. At that time they had done away with the three stripes. I don't know whether you knew that.

MR: No, I didn't.

RH: I went right, well, I was a specialist, I should have been a corporal, but as a specialist I went right to four stripes. So that, I ate at the first three grader table at the mess hall and plus the fact that I got a room. But, then later they reinstalled the three stripes. But I was an E-5 with four stripes which was, that's an E-6 rank. The reason that I got promotions, bing, bing, bing was because the job that I was holding down was actually a sergeant first class.

MR: Oh.

RH: That's the assembly sergeant. Maintenance sergeant was a master sergeant. Because they asked me when Swank was, he came down here as a Warrant Officer after he left Battalion. They asked me if I wanted to take the maintenance or stay as assembly sergeant. I said, "Well, it's only a few months so I might as well stay where I am at. I was quite satisfied with the way things were going.

MR: So when you left, that was when you got married?

RH: Yeah. I got married about 5, 7 days after. From there I left and went to General Electric in Syracuse.

MR: Oh, okay.

RH: And worked on the Atlas 8413 program. The Atlas Tracker. And then I went into an advanced development group and I worked on many, many different military contracts. The inception of them. Special radars, we did the first phased radar. That's the ones they are using on board ships now with the big flat panels that are on the sides. That's all phased ray. We did the first phased ray antennae in the group that I was in.

MR: Were you recruited while you were serving?

RH: No. No. I was looking for a job. I could have gone to Grumman Aircraft. I would have like that job probably. But the job they were going to offer me wasn't going to come along for six months so they offered me another job for that time. Had my Mother-in-law found out about that job she would have probably shot me. Because I turned it down. But I did end up going with General Electric. I worked on the signal processing unit for radar that was going to be used on the anti-missile missile. So, I did go to Kwajalein to set up our signal processing on the radars down there. I did get to see...

MR: Where is that?

RH: Kwadjalein Atoll, Marshall Islands.

MR: Oh, okay.

RH: That's the end of the Pacific Missile range there. I did get to see several missiles come in. I did get to see a Sprint or a Zeus as they called that. That was the after the Hercules.

MR: Right.

RH: I did get to see the Zeus fired while I was there.

MR: Really.

RH: So I spent a few weeks down there.

MR: So how long did you stay in Syracuse?

RH: About nine years. Well, no with General Electric it was like 8 and a half. But then I was hired in with a company called Amp Incorporated to make electronic connectors, now a part of Tyco. We were the largest connector manufacturer in the world. I went in there as a field engineer. And they moved me right back to Syracuse. I stayed there another five years.

MR: Oh.

RH: Then they moved me to Fredericksburg, Virginia where I covered the D.C. area. They wanted me to come inside and I wouldn't do it. They wanted me in Harrisburg. That's where their home office was. I said, "Hey, I haven't lost anything in Harrisburg". So they opened a new facility down in Winston-Salem. They said, "Will you take that?" I said, "Yeah I'll do that".

MR: You retired then?

RH: I then took a job as a product specialist and then as a product manager and then as a warranty administrator all for AMP. And then I retired.

MR: Sounds pretty good. So did you like your time working with the missiles?

RH: I did and I didn't, you know. I enjoyed the people I worked with. I enjoyed the job. I wasn't all that crazy about the military. Only because like I say I sat in on a court-martial. I've seen the way the military operates. In fact, I darn near got court-martialed at Bliss. They wanted to do it bad, but I out slicked them. So, as it turned out if they were going to court-martial me they were going to have to court martial a lieutenant so, that's another thing they gave me, I got a letter of reprimand down there. And we had a sergeant major in the student detachment and once he found your name out I ended up getting caught for, it wasn't being out of uniform but I had a pair of khaki pants on with a

green shirt. The Courtesy Patrol caught me. So I had to a week or two weeks cleaning the orderly room. And he was a sergeant major named tiger Nash. Never forget him. He had been a lieutenant colonel during the Second World War and got rified back. And once he found your name out he always had raffle tickets. And you would be standing morning formation and they'd say, "Holmes, Sergeant Nash wants to see you some time today." You knew what it was. You'd go over there and he'd say. "I have these raffle tickets I thought you might like to buy one." Of course you'd buy one. Well, I went into the officer in charge of the student detachment and he's a lieutenant colonel. And I went in and he read me the riot act. He said we are going to give you a letter of reprimand. He said it's going to go in your jacket. I said, "Well, fine". So as I came out of the office and I was walking out of the orderly room, Sergeant Nash came up to me and walked over and whispered in my ear, he said, "Don't worry about a thing." That letter or reprimand never showed up in my records.

MR: It was good you bought a lot of raffle tickets then.

RH: Well, no. Not really. So, you know, the military is there's in's and outs. It's who you know and something happens. Man, they are always out to hang somebody. That's what I got sick and tired of. You'd try to do the right thing and sometimes you'd get caught up in something. And something would screw up. And I said you know, I just I don't know if I want to put up with this for twenty years or thirty years or not. Had they offered me warrant well I had probably. And I could have done it. I could have made warrant any time because back then that was when missiles were first starting.

MR: Right.

RH: And they didn't have that many knowledgeable people. So they were making, the rule was that I had always heard that you had to be at least a first three grader to be put in for warrant. Well, I saw guys, PFC's (Private First Class) make warrant down at Bliss and so on. Because I put the papers in.

MR: Right.

RH: When I did it, it as a two year category. Well, I said that was going to make me do twenty seven months. I said well, heck its three months extra as a warrant. As my papers came down they changed it to a three year category.

MR: Oh.

RH: I said, "You know that means I'm going to have to put in 15 months extra. That's a little different story."

MR: Mmmhmm.

RH: I never pursued.

MR: But it sounds like you were able to use your knowledge towards your career.

RH: Oh yeah. Yeah my schooling was the whole thing. But back then things were different when they were drafting. Most of the sergeants, I would say a majority of them had some college. It's not like today.

MR: Right.

RH: Almost all the ones that I worked with had some, you know a couple of years of college. So, it was a little different. I don't think it was, well you can't say it wasn't as gung ho. Because like I say my son he was really a ranger and airborne air assault. He had all kinds of scare badges and so on. He was really gung ho. He was infantry and then he got mixed up in something and he left the infantry and went into transportation. In fact, he was over in the first Gulf War. They tried to get him in the last one. They gave him a choice then. He put in for, they sent orders down for him to go and he put in for a hardship because he was just changing jobs and he was starting a new job and he was supposed to hire 750 people. And they came back and said we will give you your choice go or retire.

MR: So he retired.

RH: He said I'm retiring. Well he had 20 (years) in.

MR: So he was in the Reserves at that point.

RH: Yeah. And that came about because he had problems with, that was when they were riffing people back and he was afraid he wasn't going to make major. He was a captain and he took an early retirement. At that time they were giving ten year retirements. So he took it. Well, then he turned around and joined the reserves.

MR: Oh okay. Is there anything else you wanted to say about your time? Anything you remember about Fort Hancock? Did you go swimming out here at all?

RH: No I didn't. Like I say I had some good memories and bad memories here. You know I thought a lot of Swank and as I say they did an Article 32 on him. Luckily I really believe that my testimony got the noose from around his neck so but then I knew they were going to go after the warrant officer after I testified. He had told us when we went on site that he would take care of the paperwork and Swank and I should take care of all the physical labors and so on with the missile. Well, that's what I told them. I said you know I remember standing in the middle of the assembly building floor and him telling us that. And I said as far as I'm concerned this is a paperwork problem. No one was trying to hide the fact that those missiles were down. They just didn't get put on paper.

MR: Right.



RH: That's another story in the Assembly Building checking out a missile you shove in a hydraulic pump so you can activate the fins and everything. It's on the missile rail the bayonet fittings is up and does the same thing there. But anyway to check a missile out you have to put the hydraulic pump on. Well, our maintenance guy, Sergeant Krauss who was my roommate and one of my best friends in the military, shoved in the bayonet fitting. Turned the test set on and the bayonet fitting came flying out. Oil squirted out of that thing. He had it all over him. It was hanging from the steel girders of the ceiling of the building. We had hydraulic fluid everywhere. That was fun because I just stood back and laughed. But I have a lot of good memories of the military. The military had more effect on my life than anything else. More effect than college. Right now, I've got to be one of the oldest 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants in the Civil Air Patrol. I'm on flight crew for Civil Air Patrol. And that's strictly because of military.

MR: Mmm hmm.

RH: So, I'm still wearing an Air Force uniform.

MR: Anything else you wanted to say?

RH: No, that's fine.

MR: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your time. I'm going to turn the tape off.

END OF INTERVIEW