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University of California  
Berkeley, California

Fred Gowan:  
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Ann Lage  
in 2008

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Interview #1: 10-14-2008

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01-00:00:00

Lage: Okay. We're on, Mr. Gowan. You must have a rank. I'm just calling you mister.

01-00:00:09

Gowan: Yes. I'm a retired major.

01-00:00:11

Lage: Retired major. Do people call you major?

01-00:00:15

Gowan: Major. Sometimes they call me colonel. I get a lot of calls. I think the gray hair has something to do with that.

01-00:00:20

Lage: Is that your appellation or do you go by mister?

01-00:00:27

Gowan: I go by Fred.

01-00:00:27

Lage: Fred. Okay, Fred. I'm Ann Lage for the Regional Oral History Office and I'm interviewing Fred Gowan for our Oakland Army Base Project. And today is October 14, 2008. This is tape one. Okay. We have hardly had a chance to get to know one another, but I want you to start out this interview by telling me your date of birth and place of birth, and then we'll get into, very briefly, something about your family background.

01-00:01:00

Gowan: All right. Well, as you said, my name's Fred Gowan and I was born December 9, 1939 in a small town in southeast Oklahoma called Tupelo. It was a farming community. Very, very small. If you blinked your eyes, they say, when you went through it, you'd miss it.

01-00:01:22

Lage: And what was your family doing in Tupelo?

01-00:01:24

Gowan: Well, my mother and father were raised in that area and my dad come from a large family. My mom only had one sister. Her mother and father, it's kind of unheard of in those days, but they were divorced and father remained up in the northeast corner of Oklahoma and eventually settled in the same area. He was kind of a cowboy, as was my mother's great-grandfather. And eventually, I, as a real young baby, moved to the area in northeast Oklahoma and was there until my dad returned from World War II. He was drafted and ended up going to Germany and Belgium and France. Participated in the Battle of the Bulge

and came home from the military in the spring of 1945, I believe. Of course, I had seen soldiers, because the way of traveling sometimes included trains and I remember riding on a train full of soldiers sleeping in the aisles. Probably going from Fort Sill up to Fort Riley and then onward over to Europe or to the Pacific. And one instance, I had a pocket full of quarters and, of course, I didn't know what money was. But my mother had told me that the soldiers on there were very entertaining and all of them would give me a quarter. A lot of them gave me a quarter. That's why I ended up with all those quarters.

But I remember, just before my dad returned, and the Army had began an etching in my mind, which led to a career. We'll talk about that a little bit later. But one morning, for some reason, and I was just barely four, I guess. I got up early. My mother worked at a defense aircraft plant in Tulsa. We were living in the little town of Bartlesville, Oklahoma at that time, and it was a very sleepy little town. Happens to be the site of John Paul Getty's first oil producing well that was drilled, and it's still there in the bottom of the hills. Street runs right up to it. Anyway, I walked out on the porch. My two sisters and my mother were asleep, and I looked across the street and there was a kid over there that I had seen several times, and he was three or four years older than me. So he motioned for me, so I stepped off the porch. It was cool, just before the sun was coming up. He said, "Come on," so I followed him and we walked up to what was the main thoroughfare, basically nothing more than a two lane road that ran through the edge of the town and up to the northeast. And we were standing there and there was a service station. In those days they called them filling stations, where the gas is pumped into a glass container, however much you want, and then you drain it by gravity into your tank. We were watching this farmer load up his tractor with gas and go inside for a cup of coffee.

All of a sudden, you could hear a sound, a roar coming from down the road. There was a creek down there and it kind of wound around across the creek. And the older boy said, "Come on." We jumped in this culvert, and of course, spring grass growing up. We were peering through and here comes a convoy. And I remember the cigarettes were glowing. Most of the guys looked like they were sound asleep or going to sleep. Went on past and up out of town. And I was thinking later on, as I got older, remembering that, that could have been a scene in any portion of Europe. Two young kids playing army, so to speak, peering through the grass at them.

So we left there with a fair amount of mud on us, as I recall, and I had on my new cowboy boots that my grandfather had given me. We walked over to the store. And this kid was known by the store owner, I guess, because he told him he wanted to have a knee high, which was a soft drink, and he says, "And I want one for my friend here, too." I didn't even know his name. Then the guy said, "Sure." He said, "Are you going to sign for it?" And I remember, I watched intently, as here was this kid writing his name. At that point in time, I didn't know anything about writing, let alone reading. And they gave him the

two knee highs and we drank it, and by that time, the sun had just started to come up and I'm thinking, "Mom don't know I'm doing this." But she found out in about fifteen minutes. We went back down the street and there she was, standing on the porch with her hair done up in bobby pins looking at me with her arms folded. She was a slight woman but very capable. She never said a word. Took me back into the house. She went back to bed and I went back to bed and it was a day or two before she talked to me. And she said, "Don't ever do that again."

But from that early beginning, and that exposure to the fact that my dad was in the military—he came home within three months. He was home. And I remember his medals and his stripes and the hats that he wore and shortly thereafter, we started moving as he found work, working for what was known as a seismograph company throughout West Texas and New Mexico and eventually we ended up in California in the {inaudible?} area. My dad had been out to California when he was about seventeen or eighteen years old, as did his brothers. Almost the entire family was here, seven brothers and two sisters, and they worked in various jobs. One of my uncles was a pharmacist, and his daughter still is, in Sulphur, Oklahoma. And one of them was an engineer out of Calusa, California, and the rest of them picked up trades. One of my uncles was a career Air Force veteran. And that kind of helped shape me into this stuff. So I knew from an early age, particularly through grammar school, then into high school that at some point I was going to go in the Army.

01-00:08:35

Lage:

So that early this was something you wanted to do? Did you play military games?

01-00:08:39

Gowan:

Oh, we played military all the time. I remember one instance—we hadn't been out here very long. We lived in Ceres. There was a huge chicken ranch right on the edge of town called {Summers?} Chicken Ranch and that's where some of my uncles and my grandfather were working. And it was a way home for kids getting out of school, which was a block and a half up the street. Whitmore Elementary School. And I remember this blond headed kid would come by every once in a while and he would have this Oriental boy with him. Well, I didn't know the difference between Chinese and Japanese, and the question I remember asking, and they were patient, was did you see any shooting? And then the blond headed explained to me—and he later became a good friend of the family after I became an adult. He was probably three, four, five years older than me—that this was a Chinese family and that he did not participate, nor did his family, in the war. So it was just another thing. And then we played war. There were a lot of movies. The small town had its own indoor movie house, very small place. We never missed a Saturday chance to see John Wayne or somebody like that involved in a combat role.

01-00:10:04

Lage:

Well, were you different from your fellow kids that you were growing up with, do you think, in that respect?

01-00:10:10

Gowan:

No, I don't think so. They might not have looked at it as intently as I had or had the same desires. Although quite a few kids that graduated enlisted in the Army. Not so much for the kids that were six or seven years older than us. Most of those that went in the Army was because the judge probably told them, "You either go in the Army or you're going to go to jail." But that era was draftees and my area there were more enlisted folks. So I graduated from high school in June of 1958 from {Serious?} High School, and by August, a buddy and I from high school had joined and were in. I know out of my class of 147, not all boys, but a majority of the boys either went in the Navy, Air Force or Army. For those that didn't want to go right to college. Some had no interest in college at all. I knew that eventually I would go to college, which I eventually did, but I went into the Army at that age and stayed three years and got out thinking I was ready to go onto college. Did take some courses at Modesto Junior College. Mainly just hung out with other buddies that were returning from the war. Golf became a factor in my life at that time.

01-00:11:45

Lage:

Golf?

01-00:11:46

Gowan:

Yes. And I probably made better grades in my golf classes than I did in the sociology, and English, and all this kind of stuff. But in the process of the next two and a half years, I would have a lot of young kids come to me and ask me about the military. And friends of friends, and family friends. I would, of course, you know, take time to them. They all wanted me to go to the recruiter. In those days, the recruiters are not under the scrutiny that they are today, and they met those quotas just about any way they could. So if they could tell a fib to induce someone to enlist, they would.

01-00:12:28

Lage:

Like what kind of a fib would they tell?

01-00:12:30

Gowan:

Well, they might say to them, and I know this for a fact, is that, "Okay. You want to be an MP? Okay, we can put you in an MP." Chances are you would be. You want to go into communications? You're liable to find yourself in combat engineers or the supply core or a truck driver. You might not get your school. I spent quite a bit of time researching when I got out of high school and I got the communications that I wanted, thinking that it would be good employment when I got out.

01-00:13:07

Lage:

Let's talk just for a minute, unless you're finishing a thought. Are you finishing a thought?

01-00:13:10

Gowan: No, no. Go ahead. No.

01-00:13:11

Lage: About your service. You went to Korea? Am I right about that?

01-00:13:14

Gowan: Yes.

01-00:13:15

Lage: This three year period.

01-00:13:17

Gowan: Yes. In this three-year period, from 1958 to 1961, I did have an overseas assignment. Right out of what's known as AIT. I went to six months of communication school at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and went from there directly to Korea and was over there for thirteen months and then returned from there and was assigned to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. And was at Fort Huachuca when I got out.

01-00:13:50

Lage: And what did you do in communications and Korea?

01-00:13:54

Gowan: I worked in, in those days, called dial central office. I was a dial central office repairman. It was a six-month training period and it taught you how to handle and repair and maintain all of the equipment that was inside a telephone exchange. A lot of people probably, in those days, didn't understand. It was a mechanical movement by several different types of switches and they would clatter, clatter, clatter, and they'd have a mainframe full of wires, wires going in. They'd have a test desk and generally there were operators somewhere in the same building.

01-00:14:36

Lage: Things have changed there.

01-00:14:37

Gowan: Yes. Korea were two of them. So I got out thinking that PacBell would just eat me right up and they didn't. So, consequently, I had that one dream shattered. As I said, I got to helping these kids and I got to know a recruiter real well, and he says, "What are you wasting your time for out here?" He says, "You know you like the military." And he says, "What are you interested in?" And I said, "Well, flight school." And he says, "Okay, let's test for it." Well, I had no trouble passing the mental or the physical tests and they sent me down to Castle Air Force Base, which was still functioning at that time, and I took an Air Force Class One flight physical and passed that.

01-00:15:26

Lage: And can you do all that before you enlist?

01-00:15:27

Gowan:

Oh, yes, yes. He arranged it because he was a personal friend. I hadn't committed myself to anything. And I was laying in bed. By this time, I had grown on the bad side of my dad, and he said, "Well, you know, I think it's time for you to move out," which I did. After a little bit of time, I ended up staying with a married sister and her husband with two young children. I worked during that time. But I was laying there one Saturday morning, having consumed a considerable amount of beer and pizza the night before with friends and my young nephew come running. They loved to wake me up. Come running to my bed and said, "Uncle Freddy, there's a telephone call for you." So I got out of bed. It was this recruiter. He said, "You got to be in the Army by next Tuesday. I have a class date for you at Fort Walters, Texas, to begin primary helicopter training." So I had to make a quick decision. So I said, "I'll do it. I'll be there." And he said, "Well, come on up later today when you get up."

So in short order, this was in 1965, I found myself back over at Ford Ord, where I went through basic training in '58. And I had the opportunity of going on down to Texas or staying there and I ran into an NCO that I knew and he said, "Why don't you just stay out here and monitor a class." He said, "I'll make you an acting assistant platoon sergeant and we'll get you a promotion when you go down to Fort Walters. You know, you'll be a little more ready for the Army." And that did and I went down to Fort Walters, stayed down there for twenty weeks.

01-00:17:17

Lage:

Doing training?

01-00:17:18

Gowan:

Doing training. Primary helicopter training, and that entailed being able to fly and solo the aircraft within twenty hours. If you couldn't do that, then they would set you back in class. So I went through that training. Ended up then going down to the advanced training at Fort Rucker, Alabama, and was down there for an additional sixteen or seventeen weeks. I think it was eighteen weeks. And then, of course, we all knew we were going to Vietnam.

01-00:17:51

Lage:

This was sixty-five, right?

01-00:17:53

Gowan:

Well, sixty-five when I got out. Finally got out of class, it was sixty-six. Graduated in May. Within weeks, I was in Vietnam.

01-00:18:03

Lage:

But it was the time when the war was just picking up, wasn't it?

01-00:18:07

Gowan:

Yes, it was. At that time, there was 100,000 troops on the way. Got there just about the same time I did. And up until that time, there was no real large amount of troops.

01-00:18:21

Lage:

They were more training the South Vietnamese, as I remember.

01-00:18:22

Gowan:

Yes, they were advisors to the South Vietnamese and Special Forces. The Air Force folks had their bases in South Korea or South Vietnam, as well as the neighboring countries of Bangkok, Thailand, {inaudible} in Thailand. There were several places over there had that bombers. And then Guam had bombers and fighters, also.

01-00:18:50

Lage:

And were you a commissioned officer at this time?

01-00:18:54

Gowan:

I was originally commissioned as a warrant officer and we landed on a C-141 out of Travis in Playku, which was a central highlands town, and there was ninety-nine of us, including the commissioned officer portion of our class. And at that point, we all had orders. The Army moves on orders, and they were individual orders assigning us to what was then the First Cavalry. And they were located in a place called Ankai, not too far from Playku. So we were hanging around waiting for our names to be called. And some of them had already been picked up and taken out. Some of them stayed right at Playku.

01-00:19:42

Lage:

Is this all in Vietnam?

01-00:19:44

Gowan:

All in Vietnam, yes. And they called out thirteen names and said, "Get on that C-130." That's a cargo plane that the Air Force had. "And you're on your way to Saigon for reassignment to the First Aviation Brigade," meaning that we were going not to a division but to a brigade, and therefore we would be in aviation battalion with an assault helicopter company.

01-00:20:12

Lage:

So you'd really see some action?

01-00:20:14

Gowan:

Yes. Well, either place we would have seen some action. Survivability was probably a little bit better, as far as I was concerned, in the First Aviation Brigade, and specifically the 128<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Company, which is what I ended up. Their sign for their slicks, which was the troop movers helicopters, which were basically Bell UH-1, in those days, D models. And I ended up being put in the gun platoon, which was flying UH-1 B models, fully armed with four machine guns, fourteen rockets, and occasionally we had one

or two that had a forty millimeter gun in the nose that would shoot out a forty millimeter grenade.

01-00:21:02

Lage: So why was your brigade a better assignment? Survivability?

01-00:21:09

Gowan: Well, we were dispersed. The terrain was a little more agreeable. Ankaï's in the mountains and they had a large area to cover and quite a few aircraft. You know, the First Cav Division is a storied, long-term type of an organization, a division. It's still functioning today, as a matter of fact. And they had just designated that as an Air Cav, I mean, Air Cavalry type thing. They divided the companies. The company that I was in would have been called a troop, just like the horse cavalry of years ago. And that's the lineage of the First Cav Division. So just a little bit more favorable. We had just moved out of tents when I came into the company and the guys there had made their own bricks and had built kind of a long L shape and each of the officers then could stay in it. We had the same thing for the enlisted people. It was finally finished. They had sheet metal roofs. Had electricity from generators that supplied the company and battalion. We were located at a place called Phuloy. P-H-U-L-O-Y. Had been an old Japanese strip during World War II. You become real familiar over there with the term 'ladderite,' and this particular ladderite was red-based and the dust would adhere to anything.

01-00:22:52

Lage: It's the soil?

01-00:22:53

Gowan: Yes, it's the soil. Predominant in Vietnam, all over the place. Hence red mud and that sort of stuff. But I was there for a full year. I had the opportunity to go from the most southern point of South Vietnam, the Ca Mau Peninsula all the way up into the DMZ in Khe Sahn during the period June 1966 to July of 1967. After about four months, platoon leader came to me and said, "We want you to put in paperwork for a direct commission." So I looked at the pay scale, saw that it was an immediate hundred dollar a month raise and said, "I'll do it."

01-00:23:47

Lage: What does it mean, "a direct commission?"

01-00:23:49

Gowan: Well, it's a field commission, so to speak. They interview you. Of course, they already know all about you from being in the Army. And as a warrant officer, I had background, security clearance and that kind of stuff. And I remember flying over to Long Binh, which was a larger base just located with {Beng Wa?} and went into a board. There were four or five officers in there who were about as interested in asking me questions as I was answering them. But went ahead and went through that, and they, of course, checked off okay. And

within, I think it was four months, I got word that I would be receiving a commission in transportation as a core and I began my—

01-00:24:42

Lage: So that starts your career in the transportation corp.

01-00:24:42

Gowan: Yes. Start off as a second lieutenant and worked in various jobs.

01-00:24:54

Lage: Now, did that change the nature of your activity in Vietnam?

01-00:24:59

Gowan: Yes, it did.

01-00:25:00

Lage: Less combat oriented?

01-00:25:01

Gowan: No. During the time I was there as a commissioned officer, it was the same drill. You just went out as a section leader or a team leader, that kind of stuff. They would put you in charge. Of course, by that time, I had already accrued seven or eight hundred hours of combat assault time and I knew what it was like to get shot at and to shoot at people. You know, I had seen helicopter crashes, dead bodies, both the Viet Cong and NVA, as well as US servicemen. So I hate to use the term hardened, but I was blooded, as they said. You knew what was going on. So I knew that I would be coming back to Vietnam on a second tour. During all this time, I was single and actually didn't get married until I was almost thirty-seven. I figured that it was no life for a wife. And I had seen guys come over. I didn't like to fly with them if they were married because they were nervous. And you got to react quickly, and the same goes for the folks in the infantry on the ground. Can't be thinking about your wife or your child or children if you're out there getting shot at or subject to getting shot at, and having to react real quick. And I seen a lot of them would panic and I—

01-00:26:31

Lage: And you really could tell the difference between the married and unmarried?

01-00:26:33

Gowan: I could. I thought I could, yes. And most of the time I was right. You know, you learned a little bit about the people that you flew with. And I would later read in the *Stars and Stripes*, which we received over there. That's a publication that changed a heck of a lot since then. But they reported the dead and wounded and I would see guys that we had actually flown with or done some training with that bought the farm, as they used to say.

01-00:27:03

Lage: Yes, yes. Well, you say you got hardened, but this must have taken something out of you, to be in this kind of combat situation for three years, wasn't it?

01-00:27:12

Gowan:

Yes. I had three tours. I kind of looked at it like playing football in high school. I was there probably a month before we took any fire, before the helicopter sustained any hits. You knew when you were hit. There's a lot of moving parts on a helicopter and it makes a very metallic clang or bump or thump when a round hits into you. Ironically, the weaponry that the NVA were using at that time was mainly—and they didn't know how to aim at us. It's often said that a Huey flies about the speed of a mallard. So most of the hits we took were from the main cabin, the fuselage, back into the tail section, and, of course, the rotor blades. The tail rotor turns in a Huey at 2200 RPM. The main rotor turns normally between 316 and 340, somewhere in that range, which is called in the green. So it turns a little slower.

But every one of those movements that those blades make, they are articulated and are controlled by the cyclic, which is in the left hand of either pilot—or excuse me, the collective in the left hand of either pilot and then the cyclic, which controls the helicopter. You think of the blade turning as being a solid disk. And to move it forward or backward, you would move the cyclic. If you moved it forward, the disk would tilt forward, pull in the air—give you a little aerodynamics here—and cause you to move forward. You know, you could hover it or move left or move right. It would turn like this. Your collective is what changed the pitch. When you added power, you pulled it in. That means the blades would take a bigger bite out of the air.

Your RPMs in helicopters like that remains constant at 6600 RPM. That's engine RPM. And each one of those movements are controlled by push pull tubes, all with hydraulic power. And when you lose hydraulic power, which I did on occasion, because of fire or because of mechanical reasons, the aircraft then becomes very, very difficult to control and to land.

01-00:29:46

Lage:

You're working through there. Like when you lose your power brakes?

01-00:29:50

Gowan:

Yes. It's just like driving an old Ford with no juice brakes, as they used to say. Mechanical brakes. And, I mean, it's just very rigid and hard. Sometimes you have to just stand on the pedals. You also have two pedals on the floor and when you cut power, you push in the right pedal and that neutralizes the pitch of the blade. Keeps the tail rotor, flattens it out. When you add power, you push in left pedal, because as you add power, the nose will turn to the left and you want to keep it straight. So that pedal helps you keep it. You cut power, like for instance if you were doing what is known as an auto rotation, which is a safety feature where you can land without power. The engine can still be running but you disengage the transmission from the engine and you control your descent by controlling the pitch and the blades with the collective and your airspeed. And you can take it down to a lower portion of your flight. Arc it down hopefully to a cleared area and then you do what's known as a flare. You pull back on the cyclic, which causes that solid disk to pull air from

behind and it brings you almost to a stop. Then you roll the nose over, and as the aircraft settles down or slides forward, then you just add in power and the pedal that's required, assuming you still have a tail rotor. Sometimes that's the reason why you were landing. And you softly land it on the ground. Takes practice but I've done many.

01-00:31:24

Lage: So you've done a lot of landings after being hit?

01-00:31:27

Gowan: Oh, yes.

01-00:31:28

Lage: Yes. Did you ever have a crash?

01-00:31:30

Gowan: No, no.

01-00:31:32

Lage: So you shepherded the helicopters through?

01-00:31:36

Gowan: I guess someone was looking over my shoulder. But I've seen guys roll them over. I've seen them crash into trees. Not a pretty sight. That particular helicopter, as the blade strikes something it'll jerk the transmission forward onto the part of the fuselage where the two pilots are in front and then there's a back area. In our case, we had ammunition and trays that went out to the guns and we'd have a crew chief and a gunner on both sides and they, too, had a machine gun. But it comes forward and then one of the blades will, more times than not, dip down and slice right through the cockpit, sometimes killing, sometimes missing them completely. Not all the time, but they have tendency to that.

01-00:32:32

Lage: Wow. Now, being a transportation corps, were you supplying troops on the ground or were you actually in combat.

01-00:32:41

Gowan: Well, as I said, on the first tour I was assigned to an assault helicopter company and that's what your mission was.

01-00:32:43

Lage: Right, right. But after you moved to—?

01-00:32:47

Gowan: I went back to Fort Walters, Texas, where I was a primary instructor. Actually, I taught the tactical phase of primary helicopter training and was there for a year. I knew I was going back. I got orders to go back. At this point in time, they offered me the opportunity to fly a twin rotor, a CH47. Having ridden in the back of one of them several times and knowing people who

actually did fly them, that hydraulic system in that particular aircraft, as is the Huey, is charged at 3,000 PSI, pounds per square inch. And I never been in one of those birds yet that wasn't leaking. A little drip here, drip there. So I really had no interest in that. And they had a new model of gunship coming out called the Cobra. And I said, "Well, I want the Cobra transition." So I was put on orders for Cobra transition and went on down to Savannah, Georgia, and was trained down there for, I guess, about six weeks as a Cobra pilot. By this time, my orders had been picked up by the transportation corps and they decided that I needed to be an aircraft maintenance officer, so they sent me to Fort Eustice, Virginia, after that transition and changed my orders, assigning me now to what was known as the Thirty-Fourth group in Saigon.

By this time, the buildup had really expanded and there were quite a few troops over there. And the Thirty-Fourth group was responsible for all the Army aircraft maintenance throughout Vietnam and in theater. So I went over there assigned to the group and was subsequently assigned to a place called {Dong Batin?}. It sits on the edge of the Cam Hai Dong Bay. I remember, I got in the country. I left on the eighth, crossed the date line. My birthday being the ninth. Arrived on the tenth.

01-00:35:07

Lage:

Never had a birthday that year.

01-00:35:08

Gowan:

Never had a birthday. And I've told people, tried to convince people forever that I'm a year younger. Of course, when I got to thinking about that, I've crossed that dateline a couple of times. That was the first time that actually occurred on my birthday. But I spent about four months as a test pilot, and by this time I was a first lieutenant. And had like an operations officer. And then an opening at the battalion headquarters in Nha Trang come to be and I was asked to come up and interview for the job with the colonel and I became what's known as the headquarters' company commander. Command time, at any level, in combat is, as they used to say, it's worth three to one. Six months is worth eighteen months.

01-00:36:01

Lage:

In terms of promotion and pay?

01-00:36:03

Gowan:

Well, in terms of looking good on your records. So I went up there and I was the headquarter company commander for six months and then I moved into the battalion S-3 office and was the S-3 air, they say, for the remainder of my time. By this time, I had been promoted to captain.

01-00:36:26

Lage:

It seems like the promotions came along steadily.

01-00:36:30

Gowan:

They did, in those days. There would be a long wait from captain to major. Came back to the states. Was reassigned to Fort Eustice, Virginia for the purpose of going to the advance course, which in those days was about nine months long. And it was a transportation advance course, all captains and majors. You have to have that out of the way before you can be considered or selected for the command general staff college in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. So I completed that course and it came time to reassign me. They wanted me then to go to college for two years. The Army would just turn me loose and get me enrolled in Hampton Institutes where they thinking about.

I didn't want to do that. I still had the wanderlust and considered myself some kind of a soldier of fortune, however misguided that was. So I politicked hard for an assignment in Thailand. And I could have went back to Vietnam, but I chose Thailand and I went over there as an advisor to the Royal Thai Army Aviation School and Companies. As it turned out, in my advance course, I had two Thai officers and I was able to graduate early from the class because I was required to go to a six month Thai language school in Crystal City, Virginia. It was the Defense Language Institute East Coast. Our instructor was a little Thai lady under contract. So I left early and, of course, these Thai officers knew I was coming to Thailand and they knew where I was going. In fact, one of them was company that he commanded, he was a major, was right there. So by the time I got over there, he had told all of my counterparts what a great guy I was. And they were very friendly people.

01-00:38:26

Lage:

And how was your Thai at the end of that six months?

01-00:38:27

Gowan:

Well, I could speak. I still speak a little bit of it. In fact, I was just going through some books looking for that tape that I was trying to get for you and I found one of the French training. I had some French training later on, too, French language, and then the other was Thai. I think I've probably got some old reel-to-reel tapes. Basically it was kind of a rote memorization thing and then they graded you out on a small test. But I knew enough to ask for food, where's the bathroom, all that important stuff. I understood it a little bit better than I spoke it.

01-00:39:04

Lage:

But did you have to train these officers who didn't speak English or did they have interpreters?

01-00:39:08

Gowan:

No, they could speak English. And ironically, when I got over there, first thing they said was, "We know you've been to training. We want to speak English. So we will speak English to you and you speak English to us." So I said, "No problem. I can do that." And I became pretty good friends with most of them. But I remember one time I was standing there drinking a warm Pepsi,

which is one of the graciousness of them. They'll give you a soda. Don't ever expect it to have ice in it. It would be a warm Pepsi and I'm drinking this Pepsi and these two Thai officers are talking and they're speaking Thai. So I'm listening to what they're saying and they were talking about trying to get more support from the {JustMag?}. That's the command I was with at that time. And how they were going to go about it and what part I would play in it. So after they had finished, I spoke into the conversation and I spoke Thai to answer some of their queries. They both looked at me like, "Did you understand what we said?" I said, "Every word."

01-00:40:23

Lage: It wasn't intended for your ears.

01-00:40:24

Gowan: No. From that point on, they were very careful about what they spoke about. I stayed there for eighteen months. I was in the town of {Loparee?}.

01-00:40:36

Lage: And you were training them to fly helicopters?

01-00:40:38

Gowan: Yes. And as far as their maintenance techniques. Actually got detail to take this Thai general who was the head of the Royal Thai Special Forces command there. There was a US Special Forces company assigned there, the Forty-Six Special Forces Company and they had helicopters assigned. But their pilots didn't suit this general's personality and I had played golf with him a couple of times and he had invited me to his house to look at his orchids. His troops would go into the jungles of northern Thailand and bring back these exotic orchids and he would breed them. I don't know if you know that much about growing of orchids, but it's really a technique. But he and I became good friends and one day he says, "I want to fly." And I said, "Well, no problem. I can give you all the time you need." I said, "You just have to clear it with the colonel out there."

Well, in the Thai army, rank is everything. If a Thai general or a Thai colonel says—I've seen them fall to the ground and do what's known as a very deep Y. This is a Y. It's a sign of respect. He told the general that he wanted one of the newer helicopters, which we were giving to them under the Foreign Military Sales, and he wanted me to be his instructor and not to look for me until I was satisfied that the general could fly. Heck, we flew all over the area and we shot approaches and I taught him as much about flying as I could.

At the end of my first year, a friend of mine was assigned to Laos, which is north, in his combat tour. And I knew him real well and he said, "We got a guy up here that's retiring. I want you to come up here and take this job." So I said, "Okay." He said, "Don't worry about it. Just give me your social security number and your full name." So I provided him that and I put my extension in for six months and this gentleman finally retired. He was a major and he

retired and stayed up there. So I went on up to Udon, which is northern Thailand. It's a base for the air force. Also there was components from the Central Intelligence Agency, and that was actually who I began working for. And the mission—there's still some classification to it—but basically it involved armed gun ships. These were what you called {mic?} model Hugheys. Have a wider blade and a little bit more power. And they were flown by Thai Army Air Force police pilots, many of whom I had known from my assignment in Thailand. So I went up there and that was, as I said, considered a combat tour because all of our flying was in Laos.

01-00:44:00

Lage: Oh, I see. But you were using Thai pilots?

01-00:44:03

Gowan: Yes, yes. Well, you see, at that time, the unannounced army that was over there was all mercenaries serviced by the CIA as case officers. And they would go out into combat with them to observe and teach them. Most of these guys were former military. One, in fact, fought in the Battle of the Bulge and was actually mentioned. He was one of the young troops in the Band of Brothers movie.

01-00:44:38

Lage: This is the CIA officer?

01-00:44:40

Gowan: Yes. He was a retired Army lieutenant colonel and had been with the Agency for some time as a case officer. When I got in there and found out who I was working for—I knew basically what I was going to be doing.

01-00:45:01

Lage: Did you know it was CIA?

01-00:45:03

Gowan: Yes, I did. And I will never forget. My buddy picked me up. We wore civilian clothes. I flew in cowboy boots and Levis and a cutoff sweatshirt. Of course, the aircraft had no markings. They took my ID card, gave me an embassy card. So we flew up to {Watai?} Airport in Vientiane. That's the capital of Laos. Just across the river from Udon, the Mekong River. Went in to meet this colonel, who was the Army attaché that was assigned there. And he was hot. When I went in and reported, he said, "Who are you?" I said, "Well, here's my orders." "I see that, but who are you?" He said, "I do not like to be told by name and serial number that I'm getting a new officer in my command. You're not going to be working for me anyway." He said, "I don't want any GD heroes." And he says, "As far as I'm concerned, I don't want to see you up here in my office through your tour. Don't do anything stupid," and he says, "I won't be your rating official. I've been cut out of the chain." I ended up working directly for the station chief of Udon.

01-00:46:29  
Lage: So was he kind of resenting the role the CIA was playing?

01-00:46:32  
Gowan: He did. He did.

01-00:46:34  
Lage: Because he didn't have control over the battle?

01-00:46:37  
Gowan: Well, he had control of the people that he controlled that were up there but this classified mission that I was on, he had no control over.

01-00:46:46  
Lage: Yes, I see.

01-00:46:47  
Gowan: He had his own attaché aircraft that flew him and his staff all around Laos. Laos at that time was kind of a tenuous situation. They were fighting the Pathet Lao and had been for many years. There were many factions within the Lao government. They had quickly identified who was pro-west and who wasn't, and it involved some families, some brothers. It's a real good history.

01-00:47:16  
Lage: Complicated. Yes.

01-00:47:18  
Gowan: And I'm just hitting the highpoints. But ended up taking over the nine aircraft mission there and Air America was very prominent there. They provided all the maintenance, which is first class maintenance.

01-00:47:35  
Lage: Now, was that a private company?

01-00:47:39  
Gowan: Well, it was the Agency's air force, if you will. A lot of history, good history. There were some great guys within Air America.

01-00:47:49  
Lage: I wish we could do more on this. We have to move to Oakland Air Base.

01-00:47:51  
Gowan: Yes, that. Well, if you want to go to that, we can. But, yes, that's a different era. As I told you, I'm chronicling this and when I've finished, all of that information about the Vietnam, the Laos Tour, Thailand, all that stuff, will be a large portion of this journal/book I'm putting together.

01-00:48:10  
Lage: We probably should just skim the surface here and move you along.

01-00:48:13  
Gowan: Sure. And I apologize for getting off so deep into it.

01-00:48:15

Lage: No, no. You did it because I'm so interested. So how long were you doing the Laos tour?

01-00:48:24

Gowan: I was there for thirteen or fourteen months, until the peace accords were signed. And all US personnel, supposedly, were pulled out of Laos. I went right across the border to a US Army Special Forces camp.

01-00:48:42

Lage: In Thailand?

01-00:48:43

Gowan: In Thailand. And then my Thai crews would fly over, pick me up and take me back.

01-00:48:52

Lage: So you were still operating that way?

01-00:48:53

Gowan: I was still doing the same mission. And that's what my boss wanted me to do.

01-00:49:01

Lage: Now, is that all part of the open record these days?

01-00:49:03

Gowan: Well, it probably isn't declassified to that extent yet. And I've probably spoken a little bit out of there. But it's been thirty-five years. I still see and correspond pretty regularly with a lot of the Agency folks that I had been involved with.

01-00:49:23

Lage: How did you feel about the Agency folk as compared to your Army chain of command?

01-00:49:26

Gowan: Well, they just cut through the red tape. I mean, they had their own internal situations over who's in command, what's this mean. They were competitive for the key jobs and I think that gave them sort of an edge when it came to doing what they were doing. I can tell you another story involving an aborted rescue of a downed Air Force pilot in a small spotter plane. But we can save that for another time. I'd be glad to sit down with you some time and talk about it.

01-00:50:08

Lage: Okay. Well, we'll see if we can work that in. Okay.

01-00:50:15

Gowan: We finished the tour in Thailand and then Laos and I came down on orders assigning me to Saint Louis. This is important because this was my first association with then a major, later two star general John Stanford. He was the assignments officer and I came back to Oakland and he said, "I understand

there's going to be eight captains vying for this same position in Saint Louis." He said, "Well, find your own job. Look around." He said, "I could send you to Bayonne." I said, "Well, how about letting me look around here. It's been awhile since I've been home."

So my battalion commander on my second tour in Vietnam was now the sharp army depot commander and he was just a great guy. I went over to see him and he said—you know, he was very elegant, big mustache. Looked like a Rhett Butler type of a guy and talked in nice terms. "Well, hoss," he said, "Go on into Oakland Army Base and see Bud. Bud {Methine?}." I had no idea who Bud {Methine?} was. Turns out he was a brigadier general. So I showed up and asked for Bud {Methine?} and his secretary looked at me and she says, "Do you know who he is?" I said, "No." Well, he's the commander. He's a brigadier general." And I said, "Well, I'm in the wrong office. Can you point me to the personnel office."

So I went down to the personnel office. And I was still on orders and I was home on leave. And went in there and first thing I saw was a First Aviation Brigade patch on this personnel officer's shoulder. And he saw mine. And if you've been in combat with an Army unit, you'll have a patch on your right shoulder. And the other patch is just who you're assigned to. In those cases, it would have been the white arrow with the green background, which eventually was the military traffic management command. And I said, "You have any captain slots open?" He said, "Yes, as a matter of fact," he says, "I'm requisitioning five." Once again, he said, "Give me your social security number," which I gave him. Or my officer's number. And about a week, I get a call from Stanford at my home. "What the heck is going on?" I said, "Well, you told me to try to find a job." I said, "I just found a job." He said, "Boy, you did." He said, "You're about the brashest young captain I've ever met."

01-00:53:05

Lage:

Is that kind of out of order to find your own job like that?

01-00:53:09

Gowan:

No, it's not uncommon, but they don't like for that to happen. They've got quotas that they want to fill. And when you're in those positions as an assignments officer, you can ingratiate yourself to people and they become indebted for you. In an Army, it's kind of a help pull people around. It's not necessarily a good old boy, but it is to some degree. He said, "I won't forget this." I said, "Well, sir," I said, "I hate to cause any grief but I just acted the way you had told me to." And he hung up. So then I was there at Oakland, which began my saga.

01-00:53:49

Lage:

But he was not at Oakland yet?

01-00:53:51  
Gowan: No. He was still at headquarters army. He, too, was an aviator, like myself, a transportation corps aviator. And I stayed there for four years. Began operating in what was known as the military ocean terminal bay area.

01-00:54:10  
Lage: Can I just stop you for one second?

01-00:54:11  
Gowan: Sure.

01-00:54:12  
Lage: Because you mentioned on the phone that you 'd been in Oakland Army Base on your way to Vietnam and let's put that on the record before we—

01-00:54:19  
Gowan: I had. Okay, yes. I initially came through Oakland Army Base on a train. This was in 1959. On a train from Little Silver, New Jersey. Eight of us had finished our advanced training at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and was on their way to Korea. So they brought us into Oakland, where we signed in, and then I went on leave for about ten days. Came back to Oakland and instead of going aboard a troop ship at Oakland or the Naval Supply Center, we all flew over. So we went up to Travis Air Force Base and got on a Pan American clipper and then I went to Korea for the first tour. Excuse me. Anyway, the second time was when I finished flight school and Oakland was the jumping off spot to go over to Vietnam. So we showed up there in late May of sixty-six. Stayed about two days, did a little bit of processing.

01-00:55:25  
Lage: You stayed in the—

01-00:55:27  
Gowan: At the base yes, in the barracks.

01-00:55:32  
Lage: And were they officers and enlisted men both kind of waiting?

01-00:55:34  
Gowan: Yes. I think they let the officers stay off in motels and they put the warrant officers in the barracks, which was all right.

01-00:55:44  
Lage: What was it like with all these, some of them just kids, heading off to battle?

01-00:55:50  
Gowan: The kids were constantly doing and saying things that caused you to kind of look sideways at them. Some of the warrant officers had been senior sergeants and given up their NCO status to go into the flight program to become a warrant officer. So they were settled and they were sprinkled throughout my class. And most of the officers, the highest ranking one was a captain and he

was a very young captain, and the rest of them were lieutenants, first or second lieutenants.

01-00:56:26

Lage: But is this a time when people are saying, "What the heck am I doing here going off to battle?" or are they looking forward to it?

01-00:56:31

Gowan: No. I didn't see that much. Not at Oakland. And, of course, we hop scotched across. From Travis we went to Hawaii. And when they loaded you on the C-141, in those days, they had no seats that faced the front. So you went in that big cavernous aircraft, and there's a picture of one on that collage in there. We sat backwards. And you looked at the rear of the aircraft. And then the latrines were shrouded in canvas tenting and were like port-a-potties for the trip. So we were in Honolulu just long enough for everybody to get a couple of beers and back on the plane and then we took off.

01-00:57:23

Lage: And how many troops would be on this plane?

01-00:57:25

Gowan: Well, in this particular one, there were ninety-nine of us, including all the warrant officers and then the commissioned. And there were some folks who were hitching rides that were not part of our group. So the total on the plane was probably about 150.

01-00:57:42

Lage: And that's the way you got to Vietnam? Not by boat or ship?

01-00:57:45

Gowan: No. Some of the units, early units, like the First Cav, a lot of them went over by ship.

01-00:57:51

Lage: So you didn't really ship out of Oakland, but you just were processed through there?

01-00:57:55

Gowan: Processed there and then they moved us from Oakland up there. But I never went out on a ship, no.

01-00:58:02

Lage: And then you said you were assigned to Oakland in 1970 for a brief time.

01-00:58:05

Gowan: Yes, I did.

01-00:58:06

Lage: What was that all about?

01-00:58:08

Gowan:

Well, I was at Oakland from late seventy-three to seventy-six. And left Oakland to go to the Army's degree completion program. And went down to Tampa University and was down there for fourteen months, and then I was sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to undergo another lengthy course called the Foreign Area Officers Course. Because I spoke Thai and had identified with Southeast Asia, I was known as a South East Asian FAO, Foreign Area Officer. Graduated from there and they didn't have a proper assignment for me, so they had a position in Korea. By this time I was married and had twin boy, plus my wife's son who was just five years old. And eventually she ended up joining me in Korea and I stayed over there for two years.

01-00:59:19

Lage:

This is post-seventy-six?

01-00:59:22

Gowan:

Post-seventy-six. Post-seventy-six.

01-00:59:22

Lage:

Yes, okay.

01-00:59:24

Gowan:

I'm sorry if I confused you there.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 10-14-2008.wav

02-00:00:00

Lage:

We're back on with tape two, still with Fred Gowan, and it is still October 14, 2008. Okay. We're back on and now we're really going to get into the Port of Oakland and the hands on work you did there. At least my notes show seventy-three to seventy-six.

02-00:00:27

Gowan:

Yes.

02-00:00:29

Lage:

What was your assignment there?

02-00:00:31

Gowan:

My first assignment was to the, which was a subcommand that had the misfortune, as they say, of being assigned at the headquarters. Therefore, the commander became, by inference or by proximity, part of the MTMC command commander's staff, which was always kind of a sore point.

02-00:00:59

Lage:

Now, I just don't get it because I don't have much military—

02-00:01:04  
Gowan: Well, it was a colonel's position. O-6, full bird colonel for the MOTC commander.

02-00:01:12  
Lage: And where was he?

02-00:01:13  
Gowan: He was there at Oakland.

02-00:01:13  
Lage: At Oakland.

02-00:01:14  
Gowan: Co-located with the military traffic management command's western area.

02-00:01:20  
Lage: I see.

02-00:01:22  
Gowan: Which was a brigadier general's slot, the overall commander.

02-00:01:26  
Lage: And this man?

02-00:01:28  
Gowan: This man, when I got there, was Bud {Methine?}. He was just a fine gentleman. He and his wife were just real good people.

02-00:01:39  
Lage: So he was the commander on the Oakland Army Base.

02-00:01:40  
Gowan: He was the commander.

02-00:01:42  
Lage: Now, what was this other co-command?

02-00:01:43  
Gowan: The other was a subordinate command. The Military Ocean Terminal Bay Area. It was MOTBA. And that is a full colonel's position. He then had subcommands under him in the ports of Seattle. Actually, Pierce County, but headquartered in Seattle, and then also down in Southern California.

02-00:02:12  
Lage: And Oakland?

02-00:02:13  
Gowan: And Oakland. So it's a military ocean terminal command position. Had produced a few stars. There had been some colonels who were promoted out of there. It was the equivalent of a large brigade type command, troop command.

02-00:02:32

Lage:

And how did this mesh with the MTMC command?

02-00:02:37

Gowan:

Well, it meshed well, except, as I said, because he was close, because he was there, as I say, he had the misfortune of being co-located with the flag. We picked up a lot of staff duty that the brigadier general's staff should have picked up. We always had someone coming from one of the staffs, either international traffic or from the household goods section or somewhere would be down there looking into what we were doing. Really wasn't much you could do about it. And they didn't get involved in the day-to-day operations, although I kind of think, from my experience, that they would have loved to do that. But they didn't. Excuse me.

02-00:03:27

Lage:

But they'd kind of be—

02-00:03:30

Gowan:

Yes. They kind of layered themselves around.

02-00:03:33

Lage:

And who did you actually report to on a day-to-day basis?

02-00:03:36

Gowan:

On a day-to-day basis, I worked for a lieutenant colonel and he was the—

02-00:03:42

Lage:

Who was there on base?

02-00:03:43

Gowan:

He was the pier operations officer. And I was specifically the break bulk, meaning cargo that's not containerized, branch chief and my domain was the piers five, six and a half, and seven.

02-00:04:06

Lage:

Okay. So can you tell me what went on at piers five, six and a half, and seven?

02-00:04:12

Gowan:

Well, they were the port of debarkation for all of the supplies. The majority of the supplies went from the West Coast to the Pacific, to include Hawaii and, of course, Vietnam. And they loaded various types of ships during that time. All of them had to be US flag carriers. And a break bulk ship is different than a container ship in that while it will take containers, the cargo is picked up from the shore or from barges and put inside the internal decks of a ship. And they would hold a considerable amount of freight. And maybe we would get somewhere between twenty-five and thirty ships a month, both inbound and outbound, because the drawdown began in Vietnam. We were seeing more and more retrograde equipment come back.

02-00:05:16

Lage:

Now, what do you mean by retrograde?

02-00:05:19

Gowan:

Retrograde movement means that everything had been moved forward, in this case to Vietnam, that was salvageable and was not going to be left there. Major parts, high dollar end items. Anything like that was containerized or made available for shipment back. Ships would load up in Newport News, which was the name of the wharfage area in Saigon, and then, of course, Vung Tau, and then the other ports along there. They'd pick up freight from them, then bring it back. Some of it went to the northwest, up in Seattle. Some of it went down south. But the majority of it came into Oakland.

02-00:06:04

Lage:

Okay. So this was a busy time.

02-00:06:06

Gowan:

It was a busy time.

02-00:06:08

Lage:

And then how did it get routed from Oakland?

02-00:06:12

Gowan:

Well, that's one of the functions of the Military Ocean Terminal Command in conjunction with the Western Area Command there, was to select the best type of routing, normally by a truck or train. Very little barge movements were made for obvious reason. I mean, internal to the coast, or between the bases there, yes, it could do that maybe up to Concord Weapons Station. But by and large it was moved by truck or train, and some air. Trucks, a manifest would be sent back with a ship. And I'm skimming over this.

02-00:06:54

Lage:

That's good. I want to get a picture of it.

02-00:06:55

Gowan:

And we would get an advancement manifest. So basically we knew what was coming. Each piece of freight in there had a transportation control number and each piece of freight in there had a transportation control document, TCD, that was supposedly the proper designation for what had come back. A lot of the stuff was pretty easy to determine what it was. It was a vehicle or an armored personnel carrier or conex. And there's when it got into the gray area, because you really had no idea of knowing what was inside a sealed conex except for the paperwork that came back.

02-00:07:36

Lage:

Now, what's a conex?

02-00:07:38

Gowan:

It's a metal container that is made specifically for the military. And they had several types. They had forty foot, twenty foot, which is used quite a bit now, called TEUs, and then they had the small class C conex, which was about six by six by six. I'm just guessing. Maybe more, maybe a little bigger than that.

02-00:08:04

Lage:

But there would be a manifest that listed what's in it?

02-00:08:07

Gowan:

Yes. It would say conex number so and so and it'd be stenciled on the sides. Contents. This is what's in there. And it's going to Tooele, Utah or to wherever it's going. For the most part it would be truck. And within the Military Ocean Terminal Command, MOTBA, they had truck control and a branch or division that deciphered the manifest and the individual control documents, and they would in turn contact the transportation area or truck control area. Contractors who have tenders on file with the government would be called in and loaded up to move this from point A to point B.

02-00:09:00

Lage:

I see. Now, was your job to look at that whole process or were you overseeing the work on the piers?

02-00:09:07

Gowan:

I actually got involved in everything except the warehouse work. That was another officer's domain over there. Mine was what's on the pier, what's coming in, what's been moved, what is to be moved, and questions. Would say, "Why has this been here so long?" Or we would set aside freight that came in with no papers, which occurred quite often. And I don't know about the other officers, but it kind of caused my antennae to go up as to just what is this. Took quite a bit to get into those containers. I mean, not the physical thing itself, but making sure you weren't opening up something that you weren't supposed to see. I told you about the incident with the Agent Orange.

02-00:10:06

Lage:

On the telephone, but this seems like a good time to tell it on the tape here.

02-00:10:11

Gowan:

Well, of course, Agent Orange was used extensively in Vietnam and I became quite familiar with it from flying helicopters. Often flying right after the large Air Force planes had flown across the country low level, dumping this stuff out. We would be required to fly in there. And I've seen it so think that we'd have to turn the windshield wipers on to clear it. And we were looking for anybody that was running out from having this stuff dumped on them. It didn't cause them any physical pain, but later on it was proved to be not good and creative of several things. Diabetes and cancer, sterility, deformed children. A lot of different things. Anyway, these two shipments came in. One was marked that it had contained Agent Orange or a derivative of Agent Orange. And the paperwork stated that. So we set that aside in an area that nobody went into except those people that come and get it. Move it on down. And it required an escort and we shipped that particular container up to Herlong, which is an Army depot there, and they stored munitions.

02-00:11:30

Lage:

In?

02-00:11:32

Gowan:

It's in California by Susanville. Another container was there but the contents were not marked as containing Agent Orange.

02-00:11:44

Lage:

Were they marked as something else?

02-00:11:47

Gowan:

Yes, it was marked as general freight. Freight all kinds. Something had to go there but not Agent Orange. Nowhere on the paperwork or the manifest. So I ended up having my guys ship it up there and a Navy lieutenant commander was in charge of the manifest breakdown. And he didn't see anything about it. Sent it down to me. Two truck patrols had come on. You can move it here and here's the truck that's going to get it. Well, freight went up to Herlong and then they looked at the manifest and didn't see anything on it. They opened it up, and it, too, contained Agent Orange. Well, the colonel up there was livid, to say the least. Everything rolls downhill. Came back to the command. The general was mad. Consequently the colonel in charge of MOTBA was mad, and as an end result, both me and this lieutenant commander had a letter of reprimand given to us. Even though they fully well acknowledged that no way in heck we could have ever determined what was in there without opening it, and there was no reason to open it because the manifest said one thing.

02-00:13:03

Lage:

Yes. How could they give you a letter of reprimand for something that—

02-00:13:05

Gowan:

Well, in those days, the commander that I had during that time lusted for that star. He wanted it bad. He wanted nothing to detract or make him look bad. He was apologetic, but nonetheless issued the letter, which I later had removed from my file, because I was looking to be promoted to major within a year or two.

02-00:13:39

Lage:

And you could do that? Get it removed?

02-00:13:40

Gowan:

Well, it had no merit, really.

02-00:13:44

Lage:

And they realized it.

02-00:13:45

Gowan:

He left and a new guy come in who subsequently became one of the last Army four star transportation corps officers, Jimmy Ross. And he was a real good commander and a great officer. He called all of his young officers in, as he would anytime he went on a trip to the next higher command. He'd come back and he'd call the young officers in and say, "Okay, here's what went on. This is the changes that the Army's doing." He was a true mentor, which I became as a result of observing him and other colonels do the same thing. He said,

“What’s this?” And I told him the circumstances and he said, “Well, that’s not staying.”

02-00:14:27

Lage: Well, that’s gratifying.

02-00:14:27

Gowan: And he says, “And I’ll send a letter to {Milpurson?} and tell them that all record of this in your hard copy will be removed,” which they did.

02-00:14:37

Lage: I’m surprised they didn’t follow it on down to the person who sent it.

02-00:14:41

Gowan: Well, coming out of Vietnam—

02-00:14:43

Lage: Was hard to do?

02-00:14:44

Gowan: Pretty hard to track.

02-00:14:47

Lage: Was some of the shipment kind of chaotic when they were trying to get out of Vietnam?

02-00:14:51

Gowan: Well, the chaotic scene occurred a little bit later. But a lot of this stuff, they were given short notice to pack it up and get it out. Get it to the port and it’s going to be put aboard ship. And that port commander’s concerned with one or two things. A major item is that anything that comes in that needed to be moved is going to go aboard that first available ship going out of here. And they didn’t much care whether or not the paperwork was totally correct. Something they really guard against now is accurate paperwork, in light of 9/11. And they’ve taken it just to the nth degree and we’ll still be going further. But in those days, there was no such checks and balances in place.

02-00:15:45

Lage: How did you work with the civilians? I mean, I understand that there were civilian managers—

02-00:15:50

Gowan: There were.

02-00:15:50

Lage: —of the pier operations. And, in fact, I interviewed someone. Wasn’t there in the seventies. Now, what was your relationship to the civilian managers?

02-00:16:02

Gowan: We had civil service managers, like a marine cargo specialist. They would have the marine cargo specialist. In those days, they would draw out the inside

of a ship. Physically draw or draft the packages with the number on it, where it was going to be stowed. Called a stow plan. And in finite define for freight moving out.

02-00:16:33

Lage: To properly load the ship, balance the weight.

02-00:16:36

Gowan: Yes. So it would then be staged or located, and the people who did the locating was a contractor who was assigned there under Army contract to control the ILW longshoremen. Normally I think it was eighteen. And the way they're set up, you're paying for an extra man, but you're not getting work out of him because he generally goes to the walking boss. And they're layered, structured in there to protect themselves, and that's why they have such a tight control and can really cause problems. The ILW had an agreement arranged through Harry Bridges one of their early leaders, that they would never strike any military or government moves. And to that end, they never directly struck. They would always perform. But these gangs would then bring the freight under the hook, either from the ship's gear, which is a huge crane onboard the ship, or from the gantry crane that was on the railroad tracks that went up and down pier seven, or from our 100-ton barge crane, which could pick stuff off and then make sure the freight was balanced underneath there. If it wasn't balanced, then the captain of the ship would change the ballast water or oil or fuel to make the ship stable. And every ship went out that way. So that's on outbound freight.

And I probably told you about the incident. Just so happened the night I was a staff duty officer, which, basically, you're the nighttime commander of the entire installation. And you're responsible for going down and checking different things in the name of the commander. And I had been to the pier already because that was my domain and I knew a lot of the longshoremen and the California Stevedore and Ballast was the commercial company that had it and I knew those folks. So I'd go down and have a cup of coffee with them, whoever was working nights, and then I'd end up going back up. Well, we had a steamship company in there with a ship that was called a C-train. And it had its own gear. And it looked sturdy, it really did. Big, huge pipes that were cantilevered up and then it was controlled by an individual longshoreman who sat up in the crane gantry area and moved it around and they'd put it under the hook and they'd pick it up and set it down in there.

Well, about three o'clock in the morning I get a call from the pier. You could sleep lightly when you were the staff duty officer. And they called me and said, "Jeez, we've had a terrible accident down here at the pier." Of course, there was a procedure for this. So I said, "Well, I'm going to come down and make an assessment. Are there any fatalities?" "At least one that we know of," they said. So I quick jumped in the staff car and raced down to pier seven. It was three-quarters of a mile. And got down there and it was a very serious

accident. There was the operator. He'd been sitting in the cab. The cab was crushed, because evidently they'd picked up a load that was well within the capabilities of the crane from the pier to move inside the ship and set down. It had got over the hole and they were starting to let it down when the crane arms separated, causing it to topple over onto the top of the crane cab and the person who was managing that was obviously dead, hanging out backward with one leg in the stairwell, all beat up. And the container that it had underneath it was dropped and the pipes that held the ship's crane up, welded together, were separated. And there were chunks that were five, six, seven, eight feet long of maybe fifteen-inch diameter steel pipes that were used to make this crane.

So I got right on the phone and called the general to alert him. Told him that there was one fatality. At that point in time, the union, ILW, says, "Well, we're out of here." So they called all the longshoremen together and didn't take a headcount. Of course, they knew about the one fatal. So they shut the operation down and they all went home.

Well, later that night I went back up. And I kept getting this call from a distraught lady who was saying her husband hadn't returned home. And it was common for them to stop off at a waterfront bar when they got off work and either eat breakfast or have a couple of drinks. Always involved a few drinks. Maybe that's what happened to him. We had no idea. We didn't control the longshoremen. So as it turns out, I guess he was down in the hole and when all this excitement started, he, seeking shelter, had come around a container that had already been lashed down and was on the bottom, and it was next to the bulkhead. Was just enough room for a man to get in there maybe two or three feet. A piece of that large pipe had kind of exploded and they went every which way under the weight. And it popped out, hit the top of that container, rolled down that side and crushed the individual. And it wasn't until maybe nine or ten o'clock the next morning before they found him. She was at the gate by that time knowing that something bad had happened.

02-00:23:08

Lage: Something, yes.

02-00:23:10

Gowan: I fortunately had got off duty. I'd made my report on how I reported it and everything like I was supposed to.

02-00:23:18

Lage: Was it a failure of the crane?

02-00:23:21

Gowan: Yes. Not the Army's crane. The ship's crane. And some of them would come in and have cranes that were capable or they would use their crane. And they would pay the ILW to put an operator in there or they would furnish an operator from the ship's crew. Mainly it was the ILW's responsibility.

02-00:23:45

Lage:

Were there any repercussions to having an accident like that—

02-00:23:48

Gowan:

Oh, yes. That is a major incident and, of course, the safety folks had to get involved. Reports had to be made. I was questioned at length from what I saw and observed. In those days, we would have taken pictures. Pictures were taken. But instantaneously we would have taken pictures. The fault really kind of fell on California Stevedore and Ballast because they agreed to release the gang. Had they kept the gang until they had a nose count, and each of them had a badge and collected the names to see who was there and who wasn't, given the one fatality, they would have missed this guy and probably done a more thorough search. Not that it would have done any good, because he was—

02-00:24:37

Lage:

It didn't affect the outcome.

02-00:24:38

Gowan:

No, not at all. And, of course, the equipment on the ship was looked at deeply. They left the ship there for a day or two afterwards as the seafarer's union and those folks come around to look at it. They had been recertified recently, like a month or two, in a place called {Calshung?}, which is over in Okinawa and Taiwan, that area, by a certified company that. They go in there and they give it a strength test. They look for cracks in the welds. Repairs are made and then it's given a new date. And it normally says, "Check again or check by six months or a year out," something like that. So that had been done. Clearly they did not do it thoroughly enough. I never did like the looks of those particular ships when they come in anyway. All those pipes and things were kind of stubby looking and it just didn't look like the larger ship's cranes that you saw. Self-contained ships is what they called those, with their own ships cranes onboard. That was probably one of the major incidents that occurred during my three and a half years there.

02-00:26:04

Lage:

What was the sort of work ethic that you observed in that era, the seventies?

02-00:26:10

Gowan:

Well, there were civil servants and longshoremen and contractors who were dedicated and did work. There were those who were slaggards and anytime you have an operation involving dangerous work, you don't have room for very many slaggards because that's when bad things happen. And I saw a lot of complacency with the civil servants.

02-00:26:40

Lage:

Are you talking about the cargo specialists?

02-00:26:43

Gowan:

Well, the marine cargo specialists had some personnel problems sometimes. But by and large, when they were working a ship, they were professional

about it. One of the things we watched constantly was drinking. And, of course, when freight came in that contained liquor, we had a locked key arrangement, screened area where it went until it was ready to load it. Well, sometimes they would take it out and the forklift would catch a pipe or something. Well, immediately the whiskey or whatever was in there would start to leak. And it was not uncommon to see the longshoremen take a coffee can and catch that betting that the liquor flowing through the cardboard would filter out any shards of glass or anything and they would catch this and then would end up drinking it somewhere. And I used to walk around the pier when they were working and inside the pier shed at pier seven, a cavernous building, and I'd find wine bottles stuck in pallets or in crevices. So you know that's going on. But you really tried to control that because that did lead to some serious problems, both at the base and off the base.

But there was complacency among the civil servants, because in those days they were working around the clock when I first got there. They had three shifts. We were that busy. So people were functioning but there was not as many folks there at nighttime as there were in daytime. But a lot of things went on. I remember this story about missing a guy and couldn't find him. They found him in the bathroom, one of the men's bathroom, not even on his floor, and he was in a stall sitting on a commode. He had his feet up against the door and was sound asleep. Some of them would be so brazen, if they're there at night, to sleep at their desk.

02-00:28:56

Lage: These are people who are doing deskwork?

02-00:28:57

Gowan: Yes, deskwork. The ones that had to get out, like the military police, the marine cargo specialist and all the officers. You never saw an officer slag. I mean, I'm not saying that about officers because I was one, or that all civil servants were that way. But, I think candidly a lot of civil servants would admit that there were some folks there who were getting paid basically for not doing their job.

02-00:29:25

Lage: Now, how did you handle that as a military person? You didn't have a direct line of control over these civil servants, right?

02-00:29:32

Gowan: Well, I did at the pier, although some of those civil servants at the pier didn't think so. They considered themselves superintendents. And I remember one time, there was a situation that I didn't quite understand. And I'm finding the details. I want to know because I'm figuring my boss is going to ask me, who was a colonel. And I had this civil servant there who was an older gentleman and he said, "Well, you don't need to know that." And I said, "I beg to differ with you." I said, "I need to know everything that's going on down here. This is an area I'm responsible for." So I said, "I don't want you to get mad or

anything,” but I said, “I’m telling you right now that when things happen down here and I ask a question, I want an answer.” And he said, “Well, just remember one thing, Captain.” He said, “I’ll be here a long time after you leave.” And he was right, but he was wrong in trying to work around me. I was that type of officer where I was not going to let somebody who is subordinate to me, and he was, even though he was a GS-12. I was his boss. Didn’t set well with him.

02-00:30:49

Lage: Would you go to his supervisor on the civilian side?

02-00:30:53

Gowan: Well, he was in charge of the marine cargo specialists who did the actual stow plans. And he knew that the ship couldn’t sail, or for that matter, be loaded, without a completed stow plan. He tried to use that as leverage. Ill-advised. And that was just one instance. And I had several little flare-ups with him. Anyway, he came around towards the end of my tour. He came around and was a nicer guy. But he was ready to retire, that particular guy was. There were others that you run into in the buildings. We’d say, “Well, I got to go to the building.” That meant building one. That’s where MTMC was, the headquarters. So you had to go up there and generally talk to a civilian, although my boss’s office was right in there, too. They had their own work ethic. But it took a lot of supervision.

02-00:32:02

Lage: On the part of the military?

02-00:32:04

Gowan: Well, the military pretty much takes care of itself. I mean, a sergeant or an NCO or an officer gets his instructions, his orders, he’s going to follow those orders and make sure that it’s done. Civil servants, on the other hand, might muddy the water a little bit and give their version of it. They, I hate to say, didn’t have the same standards, but many of them did or created a standard that they were comfortable with and that’s how they worked. Which included long lunch hours. Some of them drank on duty. Some of them came back drunk. At that time, there was an officer’s club, which was right on Maritime Street. That is where Sea Land is now. And then there was an NCO club in the {Contolman?} area, which was on the east side of Maritime and inside the fence. And then locally there were bars, you could get out there and have it. And there were cases of alcoholics actually working on the base, and who would go out to their car and lay down on their seat and take a couple of swigs of vodka on a smoke break and then come back in and continue to work. Some could work under those conditions. But by and large, it wasn’t fair to their fellow workers.

02-00:33:26

Lage: Well, could you report them?

02-00:33:27

Gowan: Oh, yes. Yes.

02-00:33:29

Lage: Were there many women working on the base?

02-00:33:32

Gowan: There was a lot of women. A heck of a lot of women. In fact, probably—

02-00:33:38

Lage: Actually on the piers or would they be—

02-00:33:39

Gowan: No, actually on the piers. They would come down. They worked in the office on a pier. I had three and I think there was three from the contractor also. We shared a same big office and I had an individual office for myself. And then I had two more that worked in the west end of pier six. But down at the pier, you didn't actually see them. Now, you do. They have female marine cargo specialists. And I think it's a good thing. They've paid their dues. But I had some positions that I had women apply for and so I interviewed them first and they were generally older and they were looking for a promotion. And I applaud them for that, but I said, "You know, you're going to have to be going up and down ship's ladders to inspect this cargo when it's being put aboard and after it's been put aboard. You're going to have to wear steel-toed shoes. You're going to have to wear a hard hat and coveralls," and I said, "You're going to work in the vicinity of some of the most uncouth men I've ever run across, and that would be longshoremen."

Normally, that would turn them off and they would withdraw their application. And I saw that this a lot. They were taught that a man would actually do all the hard work and they wouldn't have to do it and yet they'd still get the pay. And even in the building, on my second tour there, I had this one female who was very smart. I mean, just a good woman. She was like a GS-8 and she got this opportunity for a promotion and she wasn't really qualified for it, but she was given the job and the promotion. But she would bring her work to one of my men who worked for me to write her papers for her. So I called her up short on that and went to her boss and I said, "This is not going to work. She left my section to go to your section for a promotion. You selected her. And now she can't produce the product and she comes back and wants my two guys, who can write, to write it for her." I said, "We're not going to do that anymore." And I had a run-in. We're good friends now, but at that time, she didn't like that at all.

And it was kind of accepted, I think, throughout the building that if you couldn't do it—and I've noticed this about civil servants. If you have one who's very capable, a very hard worker, and you've got six that are all doing the same job, you will soon find that the one who's got the broadest shoulders, male or female, will end up doing most of the work.

02-00:36:26  
Lage: Yes. But it sounds as if you had ability to promote higher—

02-00:36:36  
Gowan: Yes.

02-00:36:36  
Lage: —the civilian people.

02-00:36:37  
Gowan: Right, right.

02-00:36:38  
Lage: So that was your responsibility. I see. So it was really an intertwined.

02-00:36:40  
Gowan: Intertwined.

02-00:36:42  
Lage: It wasn't two separate lines of command.

02-00:36:43  
Gowan: No. It became more so when I left MOTBA in fall of seventy-six and went down to continue the education. Eventually, when I came back in eighty-three or four, eighty-three or four, I think. Did I say that before?

02-00:37:08  
Lage: You told me eighty-four.

02-00:37:09  
Gowan: Okay. Yes. When I came back, I'm sure it was eighty-four. And I ended up working in the military international traffic directorate and I had sixty-five people working for me and sixty of them were female. And we were in the international traffic. Worked exclusively with the ocean carriers, APL, Sealand, Matson, those folks like that. And I had people in there that processed the paperwork.

02-00:37:50  
Lage: So were you kind of developing? Go ahead, finish that.

02-00:37:52  
Gowan: Well, a lot of them had been there. But I hired several young ladies to come in and work, and I interviewed a lot of them from within the command that wanted to come in and learn something a little bit different. A lot of them wanted to get out of the secretary stenotype field into transportation because they saw that as what the command actually did and had a lot of. And, of course, there was chances for a promotion. Most of them were GS-7s and GS-8s that worked in that particular area. One of the young girls that I hired now is the main transportation officer at Beaumont, Texas. And I saw her recently at a convention. And she was telling all of her friends, she said, "You know, this man was my first boss when I came to work as a civil servant."

02-00:38:48

Lage: Yes. Did that make a change to have—?

02-00:38:50

Gowan: Yes. I just people, I think pretty well. If I can have the time to pick out or choose who I want, it's important. And then, if they'll let you, you can mentor them, which as I indicated earlier, was something that the Army didn't put as much emphasis on as I think they should have. But there were officers out there who understood it. Fortunately, I was able to work with or around many of those officers and I gained a great deal because of it.

02-00:39:24

Lage: So you were mentoring not just the military but the civilians?

02-00:39:27

Gowan: The civilians. Civilians, too.

02-00:39:28

Lage: Yes, yes. That's good. Is there more to say about the seventies on pier seven?

02-00:39:34

Gowan: Well, let's see.

02-00:39:37

Lage: The culture of the place or the work.

02-00:39:39

Gowan: Yes. You know, hard work. It was dirty. A lot of characters, individual characters. We had two contract fork lift drivers that were kind of grandfathered in for a number of years. They were Teamsters, and consequently, every truck that came in or out was loaded by these two individuals. In fact, my twin sons were named after them. One of them was Mike {Profumo?}, now deceased, as is Tony Martin.

02-00:40:21

Lage: Mike and Tony.

02-00:40:21

Gowan: Mike and Tony. And actually, I named my twins when they were born Mike and Tony. We were expecting twins, but we were expecting girls. So we hadn't even thought of that kind of name. So I asked my wife what she thought of Michael and Anthony, or Mike and Tony, and that's what we settled on. But they were good friends. But they could do things with forklifts, load and stack stuff, that you wouldn't think possible. They took a lot of unnecessary risks. They caused some damage. The poor old California Stevedore and Ballast guy who dealt with them most was a guy named Bob {Rome?} and he was a longtime worker on the docks down there, and a supervisor, so to speak. But they would give him gray hair because they'd take off for lunch and go down to Snug Harbor, which was a bar, and they'd eat. They'd also drink a bit. So when they came back, because the work was

backing up, he'd be yelling at them. He called them Rip and Tear instead of Mike and Tony because of the way they operated. But they did a credible job. But definitely two distinct personalities.

02-00:41:41

Lage: Now, what was Snug Harbor?

02-00:41:43

Gowan: Snug Harbor is a little joint that sets on the far end of Adeline, West Adeline. And it had been there forever and that was one of their favorite waterholes. There and Spenger's and some of the places downtown, Mexacali Rose and stuff like that. Of course, I was single. I was living at Treasure Island in the BOQ and sometimes on Friday I'd stop down there and have a drink with them or something. And I became real good friends with {Profumo?} and Martin, their families. Got to know their families and everything.

02-00:42:28

Lage: So whatever you thought about their work, they were good guys in your mind.

02-00:42:33

Gowan: Yes. And they were dependable. {Profumo?} had spent ten years in the Army and he had been in the Army Special Forces. And I'm a member of the Army Special Forces Association and right off the bat, we hit it off. He knew some of the same guys that I knew, which kind of makes that bonding a little bit stronger. And they would do anything I ask. And, occasionally, I'd see him do things that I knew they weren't supposed to be doing or was dangerous, and they'd look over at me and I'd look away and walk on down the pier. I didn't want to see this. I know you're going to get it done, but I don't want to see it.

02-00:43:15

Lage: Were they cutting corners?

02-00:43:18

Gowan: They would cut corners and they dropped a load of telephone poles. A forklift that had three or four of them on there. Should have been banded and they were trying to catch up and get the truck loaded, loading the flatbed. And one of them rolled off. In those days, private automobiles going to the Pacific would be loaded. They'd come in and they would go out from pier seven. And rolled right over the top of the hood of this car. And it was due to be loaded also. Of course, they had insurance and everything, because they tried every angle they could to claim something or another. On that particular one, a decision had to be made because the car was supposed to go. So I made the decision. I said, "Well, load it and document it that it was damaged in transit." And it went on. It was going to Hawaii. I can't imagine what that young kid thought when he saw that shiny car.

And after that, they stopped shipping them in break bulk. They would put them inside containers and eventually they would put them on what was known as a roll on/roll off ship. They'd go in there and lash them down. But

an area of MOTBA also was the POV section, they called it, privately owned vehicle section. And they would stuff the vehicles into a container, block them and brace each wheel, tie it down with cables and turn buckles so that it wouldn't slop around. There was clearance on both sides and that's the way they eventually started shipping all the POVs. I think now they do it like with the row-rows. They can just drive it on board, lock it into place, and then they'll stack them in there just like it was on a car lot.

02-00:45:12

Lage: So any enlisted man who goes to service in a foreign country can have a car shipped?

02-00:45:22

Gowan: No. Number one, he has to be the right grade. If he's a sergeant or higher, he can ship a vehicle normally. And he has to be going someplace that is authorized. It'll say so on his orders. Once again, we get around to nothing happens in the Army, or the military, for that matter, unless there's an order saying do this. That you're authorized to have your family, you're authorized to ship your household goods to include a privately owned vehicle. And you get orders like that, then it goes.

02-00:45:58

Lage: Seems like just a huge enterprise to be sending the vehicles.

02-00:46:00

Gowan: It is one of the biggest. One of the biggest.

02-00:46:05

Lage: How were race relations in these years?

02-00:46:08

Gowan: Majority of the folks that worked at Oakland, and General Stanford brought this up himself. I think the black and the Hispanic made up pretty close to sixty percent of the workforce.

02-00:46:32

Lage: Are we talking about the whole workforce? Contractors, civilians?

02-00:46:37

Gowan: Yes. Well, the contractors you saw like at the pier, most of them were not black. Some were Latinos. The longshoremen were just a deuce mixture. You would see just about anything. And they had no problem with black and white working together. I had no problem with black and white working together. As a matter of fact, my wife is black. And I met her there at Oakland Army Base, which is another saga.

02-00:47:12

Lage: Oh, you did?

02-00:47:15

Gowan:

Anyway, in the building, there were quite a few black women who were supervisors. Very smart women. A lot of them would not take any guff from a man. I loved to see that. Particularly in truck control, there was one black lady who was just a darling. But if a truck driver came in there and was giving any of her people any guff or anything like that, I mean, she would straighten him out in a heartbeat. And a couple of them were very capable of doing physical injury to anybody. Didn't make a difference man or not. They knew how to fight. And I have some lifelong friends that I made there and still see them today, and many of them have passed on. But I had, I think, a real great relationship. People would work for me that maybe wouldn't work for someone else. And not that I was any easier on them, but I guess just the way I handled situations.

02-00:48:28

Lage:

Well, that's nice to know about yourself. Now, we've really focused on the seventies. Should we move into your assignment on the eighties? In between seventy-six and eighty-four. Give very brief what you were doing.

02-00:48:47

Gowan:

In that time?

02-00:48:47

Lage:

You started to tell me. You went to Korea. You went to school, did you say?

02-00:48:50

Gowan:

I went to college, got my Bachelor of Science degree from Tampa University. Went to Fort Bragg.

02-00:48:59

Lage:

Now, first, you didn't want to do that earlier on.

02-00:49:01

Gowan:

Well, I knew I was going to eventually. But I had just another windmill to tilt and I wanted to go where the action was. So that's why I kept pushing it. Now, that probably was detrimental to me in the long run, but I wouldn't have changed too much. I was single. I just figured that it was my destiny to be where the action was. So I ended up in that period going to Korea, and this time I was on a combined staff, brand new command. I was staff officer for about two years, and came time to rotate. The network helped me out. I called back to talk to my assignments officer, who had been an instructor pilot with me down in Texas. And I said, "I need a transportation job." He said, "Well, I got just the thing." He said, "You got a buddy of yours, you didn't know it, that's got a company down in Panama. It's a company tour. Are you interested?" I said, "You bet." So I came out on orders. My family was there with me.

02-00:50:19

Lage:

So you married in this earlier period?

02-00:50:20  
Gowan: Yes. I married in seventy-six.

02-00:50:22  
Lage: Oh, okay.

02-00:50:23  
Gowan: Just before I went to the University of Tampa.

02-00:50:27  
Lage: Okay. Well, let's back up then. How did you meet your wife?

02-00:50:30  
Gowan: Every Army base has an education center and I was busy taking every class I could because I knew I was going to be applying for boot strap, which was the program that the Army had.

02-00:50:43  
Lage: For college?

02-00:50:44  
Gowan: For college, yes.

02-00:50:44  
Lage: So these courses would count towards your—

02-00:50:46  
Gowan: Yes. They were all like Golden Gate University, University of California, some of their stuff.

02-00:50:51  
Lage: Did they come to the base to teach?

02-00:50:52  
Gowan: Some of them did. Some of them you had to go. Like Golden Gate University, you actually had to go. And they would also come to Treasure Island where I lived, where I took, I think it was accounting and statistics there. And walking into the education center, sometimes I would get off early. They'd let me off early because I had class, and I'd go down there in uniform and sit in on the class. And there was a suite of offices there next to us, had large glass windows. And I saw this young lady in there a couple of times. And as I said, I was single and I noticed she was looking at me and I was looking at her. So I'd smile and eventually I'd nod. Finally, I just walked in there one day and said, "My name's Fred Gowan. Are you married?"

02-00:51:47  
Lage: That was direct.

02-00:51:48  
Gowan: Yes, I think something like that. Anyway, she told me she was recently divorced. And I said, "Well, would you like to maybe get a drink or

something one of these days?” And she said yes. This was like seventy-five, I guess. And we dated on and off after that, and then we started dating in seventy-six pretty straight. And I come out on orders and I said, “You know I’m going to be leaving.” She said, “What are your plans?” And I said, “Well, let’s get married.” And she’s twelve years younger than I am. So I’d already met her mother and her father was out of state. He’s since passed away and her sisters, who were living in the Oakland area.

So we ended up getting married at Oakland Army Base in the post chapel, which is probably one of the few buildings standing there. Had a West Point lieutenant that worked for me that thought I was some kind of a god and he was my best man and his wife was there, and then her small son and then her older sister and brother. So that was the way we ended up. And then when I did go down to Tampa, I went down first, got enrolled, got an apartment, and then she came down. Within a year, we had our twin sons.

02-00:53:25

Lage: Wow. Yes. Now, was an interracial marriage a big thing, either for the Army and then—?

02-00:53:31

Gowan: Yes. There were repercussions, which created a huge rift between my father and I. But all my friends from this area, whatever I wanted to do was okay with them. Same with my sisters and brother.

02-00:53:49

Lage: Well, that’s generational, do you think?

02-00:53:52

Gowan: Yes, I think it was with my dad’s case. But you know what? His father, my grandfather, was not like that. Nor are his brothers or his sisters. They were of that era.

02-00:54:05

Lage: So it wasn’t just generation.

02-00:54:07

Gowan: No, it’s just my dad.

02-00:54:10

Lage: Were you ever able to—?

02-00:54:10

Gowan: Eventually we reached some kind of an impasse. But after my mother passed away about four years ago, he went back to his old ways. And he was living in a house, in a ranchette that I owned, in my name, and he couldn’t stand that. He wanted me to deed it over to him, which I wasn’t going to do. But I had Carolyn’s name on it, my wife’s name on there, and he didn’t like that. So he was bitter there and said some real terrible things. So he ended up moving out and ended up going into the VA Hospital over at Livermore. They have a

convalescent hospital over there. And he was service connected, and this was when he was eighty-five. He was there almost two years and eventually passed away over there a couple of years ago.

02-00:55:11

Lage: How about within the Army? Were there any problems?

02-00:55:14

Gowan: Yes. You didn't see it. Maybe not for NCOs. You saw a lot of NCOs that were married to Orientals. Not many were between black and white, unless they were foreign. Black men married to a French woman or a German woman. No, no US citizens or US folks. Very few of them had done that. But I was kind of like a maverick. I just told myself, "This is my life and I'm going to lead it the way I want to." So I ran into situations later on. Very subtle. Some of them particularly involving senior officers. They would be very subtle. And I think that's probably what had some effect on me getting my promotion to colonel was that, because I had completed the command general staff, had a good record, good efficiency reports.

02-00:56:29

Lage: You mean why you weren't promoted to colonel?

02-00:56:30

Gowan: Yes. Yes.

02-00:56:32

Lage: Oh, that's interesting.

02-00:56:33

Gowan: Yes. And I don't tell everybody that, but I kind of felt that that had something to do with it.

02-00:56:40

Lage: Did you have more than a feeling?

02-00:56:42

Gowan: Well, you couldn't nail it down. But we went to a receiving line down in Panama and it was my battalion that I was with, and the company was assigned to an infantry brigade. And the infantry brigade commander was from the south, as were several of his colonels, deputy brigade commanders. And one of them happened to be my senior rater. So we were going through the receiving line. And, of course, it's formal. And in those days, down there, you had a mess white uniform, which is like a very chic looking tuxedo type of arrangement with a cummerbund and a waistcoat. It's just one of the highlight pictures or uniforms. And there was a guy in front of my wife who was black.

And when you go through the line, the aide of the general greets you on the line and you tell him who you are and he passed it next and it goes until it gets to the general. Well, the captain gave his name and he preceded through

seeing the black lady. The assumption was made that that was Mrs. whatever his name was. I forget now. And then when I came through, I said, "Major Gowan and this is my wife Carolyn." Introducing to the general. And I could see this look on his face. But I had already achieved regular Army status. I was a regular Army major and a lot of them were still reserve officer majors. And I had went through the drill of applying for a regular Army commission. Knew some people in the right place, which helped me, and got that regular Army commission. So I knew that I was going to have twenty-two commissioned years whatever happened, and if I got promoted, it could probably go up to twenty-eight or thirty. So that was the first indication.

So the next efficiency report I got, which would go before the board, was from this colonel. And I felt that he was under guidance to not select me. Although I had been the best company commander in the battalion. My battalion commander rated me number one and this guy rated me in what's known as the four block. He had fifty-one majors to rate throughout the brigade, and I was like in the four block, along with two or three other guys. If you're not in those first two blocks, you're—

02-00:59:37

Lage: You don't get promoted.

02-00:59:38

Gowan: It hurts.

02-00:59:39

Lage: And this was in that period in the early eighties?

02-00:59:42

Gowan: Yes.

[End of Audio File 2]

Begin Audio File 3 10-14-2008.wav

03-00:00:00

Lage: We're back on with tape three with Fred Gowan on October 14<sup>th</sup> for the Oakland Army Base Project. Okay. We were last talking about reactions to your interracial marriage in the military. Is there anything else to be said about that?

03-00:00:22

Gowan: No. Nothing as direct as that instance that I described to you. But, as I said, my father had a terrible time with that for the remainder of his life.

03-00:00:35

Lage: How about your mother?

03-00:00:36

Gowan:

No, she did not. My twins were born in Tampa. She was on a plane down there, as she did all of my sisters and my brother. When their first-born was there, she was there in kind of a tradition thing. My mother-in-law was there also, and they had met each other. My mom, like all moms, is special and she certainly applauded anything that I did. I'm sure she loved me as I loved her.

03-00:01:14

Lage:

And how about your wife's family? Were they accepting?

03-00:01:16

Gowan:

Yes. They had no problem at all. They all wanted to watch me dance one time and they always say, "White men can't dance." I kid my mother-in-law now. I tell her one of my brothers-in-law, not the original one, but one of them now is white and they live down in Arkansas. So I said, "Boy, isn't it ironic?" I said, "Mom, you only have two sons-in-laws and both of them are white." And she laughs about that. Her sisters and everybody just treated me super. I've always tried, I guess with a certain amount of success, to quickly assess a situation as far as how you're going to play in it and what you're going to do in it. And if you're with a general one day and a private the next, to draw on an analogy with the military, you have to be able to transition and go through these things. And the same goes with cultures that you run into in life and people. Some expect you to be one way, some expect you to be another way and you got to recognize which is which. Not that I had to step down or anything to talk to and get along with my wife's friends and relatives. We just met each other on a nice even keel.

03-00:02:48

Lage:

Okay, well, that's good. Let's get you back. You're starting to tell about getting assigned again to the Oakland Army Base.

03-00:02:56

Gowan:

Yes. I came back to Oakland.

03-00:02:58

Lage:

In eighty-four.

03-00:02:59

Gowan:

Eighty-four, after spending time in Panama. And I was assigned to the International Traffic Directorate. Worked for a very good colonel, Roy {Yamacheke?}, Japanese American and was there for about two years. Colonel {Yamacheke?} was reassigned and ended up working for another colonel shortly. By this time, there was a slot open for a deputy commander in Korea in Busan, which was a port that the military traffic management command controlled. And I knew the commander. In fact, I knew him when he was a young captain. He was fast tracked. He later was promoted to lieutenant general. Retired as a lieutenant general. I just had dinner with him in Reno about a month ago. Him and his wife. And he was over there in Korea and he needed a deputy and they wanted to protect the slot. So he came back

on the staff. Contacted me and asked me if I would go over there and be his deputy. He was a lieutenant colonel but he hadn't been promoted yet. They frocked him.

03-00:04:28

Lage: Now what does that mean? Frocked?

03-00:04:29

Gowan: Well, that means they pin him. They put the rank on him but they don't promote. And that's to hold the position. But they don't get the actual promotion until their number comes up. And he was a below the zone selection, meaning he was promoted earlier than his contemporaries.

03-00:04:45

Lage: Now, how does that happen?

03-00:04:46

Gowan: Well, he's just a first string. Very heady, smart guy, and you just knew. And the Army recognized this. That here's an officer who has the greatest potential around and he should be promoted early. That's called fast track, which normally means they're going to get a star. And he did. But I went over there and worked for him. And he said, "Look, I know you outrank me." Heck, I was a senior ranking major throughout all of MTMC. And he said, "But I need a good, steady hand." So I went over and took that job. And he said, "Bring your wife. Bring Carolyn and the boys." So they came over with me. We actually moved into his quarters when he left, and then another friend of mine—by this time you get to know everybody—came in as the commander.

03-00:05:41

Lage: So you actually outranked him, at least on paper?

03-00:05:43

Gowan: Yes, yes.

03-00:05:45

Lage: Even though you were his deputy.

03-00:05:46

Gowan: Right.

03-00:05:47

Lage: Interesting.

03-00:05:48

Gowan: And then he eventually got promoted when his time came up.

03-00:05:52

Lage: Yes, yes. Well, let's go back and just talk more about the International Division work, because that's what I'm supposed to be asking you.

03-00:05:58

Gowan:

In the International Division, I think I may have mentioned I had about sixty-five people work for me, and all but five were women.

03-00:06:08

Lage:

And what was the main purpose of that division?

03-00:06:10

Gowan:

Well, that division negotiated with the various ocean carriers for shipping movement and retrograde movement from and to the different ports throughout. By this time, the war was over. And the other war was on the horizon, but we didn't know that just at that time. But what we did there was to keep control of the contractors. We reviewed all the contracts with the Navy legal officers involving the ocean carriers, the US flag ocean carriers. And there were four major ocean carriers and whoever had the lowest rate during a period of time was guaranteed, I think, seventy percent of all the ocean freight. And then it split up the remainder with the other four carriers so that they could still have a government presence. They were very competitive but they were only allowed to put in rates at a specific time. I think every two years. So whoever came out with the best rate normally got the lion's share of the freight.

03-00:07:20

Lage:

Who was carrying the lion's share while you were there?

03-00:07:22

Gowan:

Oakland-Hawaii was almost exclusively Matson, mainly because they had the only ships that consistently ran back and forth. Of course, they had commercial business and their real estate empire over there in Hawaii. Lykes Brothers was another one. American President Lines. Let's see, who else. APL, Matson, Lykes. Sea Land was another one. So all major carriers based mainly in the Oakland area. The volume of freight was significant.

03-00:08:08

Lage:

It couldn't have been as busy as that period winding down from Vietnam.

03-00:08:13

Gowan:

No. It started to wind down a little bit. I think I've only seen the pier area cleared in the almost eight years of MTMC service that I had, the earlier one and the second one, where it was cleared to the point where you could actually see a clear outline, a delineation of the parameters and everything. So it was significantly less freight.

03-00:08:42

Lage:

And what about the type of thing? Who were you supporting? Who were you sending things to?

03-00:08:49  
Gowan: Well, we have a very viable presence in the Far East. And at that time, we had Japan, Korea, Okinawa, Singapore, Thailand, Australia, all those places received something. Wake Island. Anyplace in Guam.

03-00:09:11  
Lage: Wherever you had servicemen stationed.

03-00:09:13  
Gowan: Right. Or a civil service presence or a government presence.

03-00:09:17  
Lage: Oh, a government presence.

03-00:09:19  
Gowan: So they would ship it in. They didn't fly everything. There was some stuff that was category one, had to be moved by air in order to get there. But by and large, the resupply system is set up to where something's in the pipeline all the time based on the usage factor. If you're using truck tires for your deuce and a half, they don't send you a set of tires every time a truck runs out. They've got a set or more in motion and there's very small inventory kept at the installation. That gives you kind of a pipeline and it cuts down on storage cost, purchasing cost. Actually, it delays purchasing cost, but it does cut down on storage cost.

03-00:10:04  
Lage: Now, you discussed in the seventies this kind of split command between the MOTBA—

03-00:10:14  
Gowan: MOTBA.

03-00:10:15  
Lage: —and the base itself.

03-00:10:16  
Gowan: Right.

03-00:10:17  
Lage: Did that continue here?

03-00:10:18  
Gowan: Pretty much the same way. I, of course, had empathy for the MOTBA commander.

03-00:10:25  
Lage: But who did you work for?

03-00:10:26  
Gowan: At this time, I worked for the general, and my boss currently only—

- 03-00:10:32  
Lage: The general based on—
- 03-00:10:33  
Gowan: Was the overall commander of western area MTMC, which basically was everything from the Mississippi all the way out to the Pacific.
- 03-00:10:42  
Lage: Was this John Stanford?
- 03-00:10:44  
Gowan: Initially it was Bud {Methine?}. There was one other one before {Methine?}. Bill {Farmin?} and soon after that they started downgrading it to colonels. But the last general that I worked for was Bill {Farmin?} and retired.
- 03-00:11:17  
Lage: That was in the later eighties.
- 03-00:11:18  
Gowan: Yes. And through my retirement of thirty-one, May eighty-eight.
- 03-00:11:23  
Lage: So you didn't report to this MOTBA command anymore?
- 03-00:11:25  
Gowan: No, he's separate. Yes, they were separate. Of course, I knew what their mission was, knew how to operate {inaudible?}. And actually, having been in that command, and then coming into International Traffic really gives you a leg up, because you know the people, you know the mission down there. You can tell when they're not giving you all the straight information. You have control of what ships they get and when based on how much freight they've accumulated. Containerized or break bulk. And we got to see more and more containerization.
- 03-00:12:00  
Lage: Yes. Over this time you saw it more.
- 03-00:12:03  
Gowan: Over this time, yes. And to the point where it is now. And now, Oakland, of course, they can rent the pier back, lease the pier back at any time to work a government ship. But by and large, most of the stuff's done commercially.
- 03-00:12:20  
Lage: Shut down. You mentioned to me on the phone an incident—I'm not sure which time period it was—with an Israeli ship and a Taiwanese crew.
- 03-00:12:29  
Gowan: Yes. That was—
- 03-00:12:30  
Lage: Was that during this international division?

03-00:12:31

Gowan: No. That was actually during the first tour.

03-00:12:34

Lage: Oh, it was. You want to tell about that?

03-00:12:37

Gowan: Yes, that was an interesting deal. The Army personnel carriers were made by Food Machinery Corporation down in the South Bay. Fremont, San Jose, in that area. And a war was going on. Like it's never let up. Still goes on to some degree. Anyway, Israel was upgrading its military and part of the deal was that it was buying these armored personnel carriers, APCs, from Food Machinery Corporation and paying for the transportation over to the Mediterranean, subsequently going into Haifa where they were unloaded. Well, there had been Arabs taking over cruise ships, Hebrew folks executed. Pushed a guy off in a wheelchair off into the ocean. I can't recall the name of the ship. But there was enough concern that ships going into the Mediterranean were very cautious, particularly those laden with war like materials. Well, there was a certain amount of security involved in escorting them from San Jose-Fremont up 880 to the base, stockpiling them in there, as little as possible, trying to get them loaded, which meant twenty-four hour operations, something which we at the pier didn't do that much, at that point in time, latter part of seventy-five, seventy-six.

03-00:14:19

Lage: Was it sort of as secret thing? Is that what you're saying?

03-00:14:20

Gowan: Yes. It was kind of classified and very costly. They brought in a break bulk ship and immediately started loading them. And they're pretty heavy. So they have to go down in the hole and then they would floor off over the top of them a wood floor, massive amount of lumber, heavy lumber goes in. The next layer's put in, the next layer's put in, all down into the hold. And it gets into the area where they actually have steel floor in different levels. There's, I think, four levels on most of the ships. They push them back up into those crevices, wherever they were. And so it got time to sail and they had a crew on there from Taiwan, nationalist Chinese, and they were saying, when they found out where they were going, that they didn't want to go without more compensation.

03-00:15:27

Lage: And who would they tell? The ship captain?

03-00:15:30

Gowan: They told the ship's captain. And the ship's captain—

03-00:15:33

Lage: Who was Israeli?

03-00:15:33

Gowan:

No, he was not. It was a US flag carrier and that was part of the selling price. Was you're going to be sailing under the US flag. Well, they said that doesn't make any difference. We're subject to be boarded, attacked, rammed, all kinds of different things. And they just, in their own say, said, "We're not going." So they said, "Well, we're just going to have to take you off, all of you. And if one doesn't want to go, none of you get to go." So they ended up taking the entire crew. And I'm not sure how large it was. Probably twenty-five or thirty total. The captain stayed. And they brought in a West Indies crew, and they sequestered these Chinese folk. Took their passports and eventually loaded them up on buses to take them over to an area in San Francisco near the airport where they would be put on buses to be flown back to nationalist China, Taiwan.

Anyway, they loaded them all up and they were escorted front and back, and there was two loads of them. They went through part of Chinatown in San Francisco. I don't know what route they took to get out there or whether they was trying to vary the route. Anyway, when they got out to the place where they unloaded, there was maybe ten or fifteen of them that didn't make it. Somewhere in between Oakland Army Base and the San Francisco airport, they managed to get out windows and everything else and disappeared into the community.

03-00:17:13

Lage:

That's quite a story.

03-00:17:15

Gowan:

So it was pretty interesting. The Israeli representatives who were there were all business, but clearly had deep pockets and they were not afraid to use that money. We, I think, loaded up about three of those ships that way that took hundreds, if not a thousand or more, APCs over the Israelis, which they promptly put to use.

03-00:17:38

Lage:

Now, you say the Israelis had deep pockets. Would they have been paying the ship costs, then?

03-00:17:45

Gowan:

Yes, all the ship's costs. Everything.

03-00:17:50

Lage:

Interesting. At any time, incidents like that that sort of relate to what was going on in the international scene.

03-00:18:00

Gowan:

Let's see now. Of course, there was several longshore strikes during that time, which, as I indicated, were not directly aimed at the military, and through the good graces of Harry Bridges years earlier, they had negotiated this pact that

they would not strike. They'd still load the government ships. It was kind of testy from time to time.

03-00:18:30

Lage: Especially when the ships weren't really government ships.

03-00:18:34

Gowan: That's right. They were contract ships. Although, the government has gray bottoms, they call them, that belonged to the Military Sealift Command, and they're crewed by civil servants, civilians, and they are as big. In fact, they had some of the first roll on/roll off ships. And we did load some of those for international movement, too. I don't know the exact number. But there's quite a few of them. There's still some that are strategically placed in different areas. Not the mothball fleet. But San Francisco at one time had—not that long ago—had a big one that stayed right around the Pier 39 area, berthed in there.

03-00:19:18

Lage: And used in an emergency basis?

03-00:19:20

Gowan: Yes, it would be there for contingency purposes.

03-00:19:24

Lage: During this time, did you see a lot of change in the use of technology at the port?

03-00:19:30

Gowan: Oh, yes. Everything was what we called stubby pencil, meaning that if it wasn't typed up, it was written up. Manifests were all typed, hand typed. Bills of lading, all hand typed.

03-00:19:47

Lage: In many copies, probably.

03-00:19:48

Gowan: In many copies. Clarity oftentimes was lost. Seven or ten copies of a government bill of lading. One is supposed to go here, one's for pay. So it really was an archaic system and a system that was ripe for the electronic world to come in. And eventually the electronic world arrived.

03-00:20:13

Lage: During your period there?

03-00:20:14

Gowan: Yes, during my period. And you got to see the use of hand held scanners, the use of barcode labels, which contains all the information that a TCD, transformation control document had. The ship's manifest was streamlined and made more readable. Less bulky. Easily controlled. I mean, there was just a wealth of steps. And what you started to see was the folks that worked at the

Army base, some had been there for a number of years, were nearing retirement. And when this came along, if they didn't grasp it right away, eventually you saw these people start to retire and fade off. And as new blood came in or the younger workers came in, they embraced all this technology, as they should have. They really didn't have much choice.

But the civil servants are like anybody else. If they hear or suspect that their rice bowl is cracking or subject to be broken, of course they get defensive. And they don't accept things as readily. And it goes on today, even with a new system, and in this age of government owned and contractor operated. Where it saves millions of dollars, still doesn't set real well with civil servants. So there was some subtle resistance to it. But it was a fait accompli. You could see it coming.

03-00:21:45

Lage:

Are you talking about resistance to the computerized technology?

03-00:21:48

Gowan:

Yes.

03-00:21:48

Lage:

Or to the contracting? The really shift to contracting.

03-00:21:54

Gowan:

Well, the contracting came afterward. I mean, there was a certain amount of it already ongoing. But the actual contracting out of the base work, which is underway right now here at this defense depot in Tracey, and other installations. Eventually it will all be under contractors. I don't know when.

03-00:22:15

Lage:

What's your opinion about what gets the work done better? Or what have you observed? I shouldn't just ask for your opinion.

03-00:22:22

Gowan:

Well, from a government observation, it's got to be an improvement. So you don't lose any control, or I didn't lose any control, over my workers or the contractor. And even today, contracting officers' representatives, normally it's a team. One or two key people, all government employees, who are there to observe and make certain that the contractor abides by the contract as written. And that has helped things. But it has eliminated some government jobs and there's more than one installation in California that's faced that. Of course, along with this came the base closings and the consolidations. That was really a bitter pill for a lot of folks. They never thought that Oakland Army Base would ever close.

03-00:23:17

Lage:

Now, that happened after your last tour, which we haven't talked about.

03-00:23:23

Gowan:

It was well on the way.

- 03-00:23:27  
Lage: Let's talk about that last tour assignment. Eighty-seven/eighty-eight.
- 03-00:23:31  
Gowan: Yes. When I came back from Korea as a {inaudible?} representative or deputy commander out there, General {Farmin?} said, "You know, you got eight or nine months left." He said, "Just call yourself my special assistant and I'll give you—"
- 03-00:23:52  
Lage: So you knew you were—
- 03-00:23:53  
Gowan: Yes, I knew I was going to retire. I had been looked at for a promotion four or five more times. Once you're passed over, there's very little chance you're going to get picked up, unless it's just some freak of nature.
- 03-00:24:06  
Lage: When did you get promoted to major?
- 03-00:24:08  
Gowan: I got promoted to major in November of 1977.
- 03-00:24:12  
Lage: Oh, way back then. Yes, that's a long time. So when you feel like you're not going to advance any further, you—
- 03-00:24:18  
Gowan: Well, by statute, regular Army officers can stay in the military until they have twenty-two commission years. Twenty-two commission years gave me twenty-seven years total service. So when I get my twenty-second year, that was the year as a regular Army officer I'd have to get out.
- 03-00:24:37  
Lage: Oh, you really have to? I see.
- 03-00:24:38  
Gowan: Yes. No chance to stay in.
- 03-00:24:40  
Lage: You didn't have a choice.
- 03-00:24:41  
Gowan: Well, they could have made an exception. They could have said, "Well, his skill set requires that he be extended." And I know cases that that's occurred. Yes, I knew I was getting out. So I took on this job of basically showing up to work and getting involved in certain projects for him. He made it easy for me. He is still a good close personal friend.
- 03-00:25:09  
Lage: And you were called senior plans officer?

03-00:25:11

Gowan: Yes, senior plans officer.

03-00:25:12

Lage: But you didn't have a particular mission?

03-00:25:16

Gowan: No. But I knew that the politics were ripe for what was going to occur and they were already talking about the base closures.

03-00:25:27

Lage: They had the BRAC Committee.

03-00:25:28

Gowan: Yes, BRAC Commission set up.

03-00:25:29

Lage: But they really hadn't put their finger on Oakland yet?

03-00:25:32

Gowan: No. Well, that's the political part. Everybody was in favor. Yes, close those bases, but no, not in my state. So politically, I think the decisions were made. I really believe the problem with the Bay Area started when Diane Feinstein was the mayor and the Navy wanted to move a nuclear powered battleship to homeport in Alameda. I think an estimate was something like thirteen million dollars a month would have been pumped into the economies of San Francisco and the surrounding areas. Because with that battleship group call all the military and their wives, their families, the ancillary ships that would service the big ships. It just had great potential for creating. But the decision was made at that time, and she, quite frankly, was heading it up. And that was that they wanted no nuclear powered vessels in the San Francisco area at all. So without much complaining, the Navy said fine. Well, it was not too much longer then they started saying, "Well, we're going to close Treasure Island. We're going to move the Navy from Treasure Island, from Alameda, from all these different areas. Hunter's Point. We'll just shut that down. And we will eventually, under the base closing authority, return this property to the civilian community." And, as they said, payback was not kind.

03-00:27:22

Lage: Is this something you've observed or is it generally accepted? This actual connection between the nuclear ship and—?

03-00:27:30

Gowan: Yes. I think from a military person's point of view, that was a very subtle way of saying to San Francisco, "That's fine. You don't want us, we don't want you."

03-00:27:45

Lage: In a way, the Bay Area has a reputation for, and probably rightly so, kind of being anti-war, not too supportive of military. Has that been something that

you've felt over the years? Has it made it difficult, the work you've done here?

03-00:28:01

Gowan:

No. But I was one of those individuals who saw the ugly side of protestors coming back from Vietnam. I wore the uniform quite proudly and I didn't think a thing of being in Oakland, out to dinner. If I left work and went straight to a restaurant or to a bar to have a drink or into a public store. And I knew that that undercurrent was there.

03-00:28:34

Lage:

So you'd be wearing your uniform out in the community?

03-00:28:37

Gowan:

Yes. And I did see some things and some comments were made. Far enough away that they knew there would be no retaliation. Not that I would have retaliated anyway. I wasn't going to bring myself down to their level. But yes, I heard that. I used to date this girl from San Francisco state who was getting a degree in sociology and she was there for a master's degree. She, of course, took the con side of the argument. That didn't cause us to stop dating or anything like that. But it was funny to go to parties where they were other people of that type there. And they found out that you were in the military or had been in Vietnam, some of them, quite frankly, were almost borderline rude in the type of questions. "You ever fly when you were high?" "Did you smoke grass over there?" "Did you let your crew chief smoke grass?" "What'd you think about all the dead babies you saw?" You know, that's one question, I could say, "I never saw any dead babies. I saw dead people, but not dead babies." So I said, "What you read in the newspaper and what was reality are not necessarily the same thing." But that experience.

But by and large, San Francisco's different from Oakland. As they say, there's no there there. But Oakland and the East Bay has its pockets. Berkeley, as you well know. I didn't let that stop me from visiting Berkeley. I found it kind of unique to mingle and go to the football games. I had friends that were there in college. Some of them there for master's degrees. I didn't run into too much problem from that level of college. But there were still those rabble-rousers that were out there. And San Francisco had quite a lot of ultraliberal. That went all the way down to the early twenties. Of course, the hippies were there, the flower children, all that stuff.

03-00:30:42

Lage:

Yes. You were really here at a time of a lot of cultural change.

03-00:30:46

Gowan:

Yes. Could see a lot of it.

03-00:30:48

Lage:

You lived on Treasure Island in the seventies. How about in the eighties? When you were married?

03-00:30:55

Gowan:

I lived at Fort Mason, San Francisco. For quarter's purposes, the main officers club and the quarters there were controlled by MTMC. So field grade officers were quartered at Fort Mason, and that means major and above. Company grade officers were quartered at Oakland in the officer's quarters there.

03-00:31:16

Lage:

So you got the commute.

03-00:31:18

Gowan:

I did.

03-00:31:18

Lage:

But also that lovely view.

03-00:31:20

Gowan:

But it was the right way commute.

03-00:31:22

Lage:

Yes. And so your children kind of grew up there in Fort Mason.

03-00:31:25

Gowan:

They went to school there on two occasions. We were there on two occasions. They went to school. My twins went to school on Union Street and it had its share of liberal teachers. The principal was a real nice guy. The bus would come and pick them up at Fort Mason and take them right over to Union School, let them off, and bring them back and drop them off. So it was very convenient. Both times we were there, they went to Union School on both occasions. My older boy, Carolyn's son, went to high school there right above Fisherman's Wharf.

03-00:32:12

Lage:

I don't know the schools that well. Not Galileo?

03-00:32:16

Gowan:

Yes, it was Galileo. Yes, Galileo, that's where he went for one year and then when we went back to Korea, of course he went, and the boys did, too, to DOD schools. And then he wanted to play football. They didn't have a program over there at that particular high school in Pusan, so I sent him back to California to live with my sister over in {Serious?} and he went to my alma mater at {Serious?} High School. Got to play football for two years.

03-00:32:41

Lage:

This is your older boy?

03-00:32:42

Gowan:

Older boy, yes.

03-00:32:44

Lage:

Yes. Now, you have the older boy, the twins, and another boy?

03-00:32:50

Gowan: No, just the three.

03-00:32:52

Lage: Three. What have they done? Have they gone in the military, any of them?

03-00:32:56

Gowan: Yes, all three of them. The oldest son spent nine years in the Eighty-second Airborne and one twin, Tony, now deceased, was in the Army for two years, and his twin brother Mike was in the Army for four years.

03-00:33:15

Lage: Was he deceased in the Army?

03-00:33:17

Gowan: No. He was killed in a single car accident. As a matter of fact, it will be nine years tomorrow.

03-00:33:21

Lage: Oh, I'm so sorry.

03-00:33:24

Gowan: About five miles down {Crispin?} Road. Went to sleep. He was working two jobs, going to Delta College, and went to sleep. Crashed into the biggest tree. Fifty yards on either side was open land. It was in this guy's front yard. So we normally drive past that once a day. Keeps the memory—not that I want it to. But you can't help but see it. He was twenty-two at the time.

03-00:33:50

Lage: That's tough. But you've passed your military heritage on a bit.

03-00:33:55

Gowan: I did. I told them. I said, "In this family, you pick up the sword and the shield and you go serve your time. I don't care whether you make a career of it or not. But if something happens to you while you're in there, they carry you home on a shield." And they understood that. My wife, I don't think, agreed with it totally. And they had no regrets, all three of them. Even Tony, the one who was killed in a car accident, he loved it. He got to go all over South America. He'd been in Panama once before. In fact, his assignment there was on the same base where we were, Fort Kobbe. He was right there at the same place. Went up and looked at our old quarters that he'd run around when he was two and three years old.

03-00:34:49

Lage: That's great. Okay, let me look here and see what I haven't asked you about. Is there more to say about sort of the base as a community? You've mentioned how many good friends you had.

03-00:35:03

Gowan: Yes. Most bases are like planned communities. They're self-contained. They have their own police force, their own entertainment. Some have their own

schools. Oakland Army Base didn't have its own school. They did have their own chapel, commissary, small PX. Guest quarters. They had just about everything that any other base would be there. That kind of takes in a lot of the people and creates kind of a family-like environment, not only from the people who live there as military members, but to the civilians who work there and help. Manage is not the right word. But are part of the military families that are living there, they're part of their life. The commissary workers, the PX workers. It's like going down to Piggly-Wiggly and you know the cashier, you know the bag person, you know the counter lady at Longs Drug Store. You also know the counter lady at the PX or the bowling alley. The medical facilities there. It's like a small planned community.

03-00:36:14

Lage: Right, right. And did it seem to work well to you?

03-00:36:17

Gowan: I think it's always worked.

03-00:36:18

Lage: You didn't live there?

03-00:36:21

Gowan: I didn't live there. But Fort Mason was similar over there, except a smaller number of people. The aura of living in San Francisco proper, getting used to the siren, but also being able to go to a different restaurant every night, if you want to, which a lot of us do it as groups. We'd select a restaurant and we'd all go down to that restaurant. Fisherman's Wharf was there, the Giant's, the 49ers.

03-00:36:49

Lage: Not a bad place to live.

03-00:36:51

Gowan: No, really. And a lot of people asked me. "You mean you lived at {inaudible?}." I said, "No, I lived in San Francisco. I lived at Fort Mason." A lot of people didn't know where Fort Mason was. That's one of the older bases around. Now I think it's all park service.

03-00:37:07

Lage: Right. And kind of integrated with the Presidio in a way.

03-00:37:11

Gowan: Sure. Well, it's separated by the marina area. But it had piers. In fact, on my trip back from Korea, the first trip over, I came back in 1959, or early sixty, I guess. It had piers where the ships would actually come in. So we picked up a number of Army families in Korea, and then much more in Japan. Had about 3,000 troops on board, plus the families, and we docked at Fort Mason, first, where the families got off to all the fanfare. And that's another thing I liked about the military. Any chance for a band to play, they'll have it out there playing all those patriotic songs and stuff like that. But that was just part of

watching them get off. And then we would subsequently pull the anchor up and went on around. Went to the Naval Supply Center and was offloaded there and then bussed over to the personnel areas of the base, and then got our plane tickets and bus tickets and went on out, too. It was kind of a replacement station, in addition to being the military ocean terminal and western area MTMC.

03-00:38:26

Lage:

Now, what do you mean by replacement station?

03-00:38:27

Gowan:

Well, that's where people are processed in and out of the Army, or if they come back. Like coming back from Vietnam, or coming back from Korea, you come in there as a central point and they make sure you got your shots, ID card, dog tags, all your basic issue. If you don't have it, you recoup it, load it into a bag. And then they cut your travel pay or give you a travel voucher. You go catch a bus or go catch an airplane or a train that takes you on to your next assignment.

03-00:38:58

Lage:

I see. Okay, one other thing that I see here. You had told me a story on the phone that I think is worth repeating. You mentioned something about an MP.

03-00:39:08

Gowan:

This occurred on the first tour.

03-00:39:14

Lage:

In the seventies.

03-00:39:16

Gowan:

In the seventies. And this young MP lieutenant was energetic, to say the least, and clearly in love with the fact that he wore a gun and drove a car with red lights. Most of the guys laughed at him because of his overzealousness. And he had a couple of instances that eventually got him sent to Korea where he could really get into some good MP duty over there. The first thing I remember was they had a maritime street, Oakland main street divides the base. Well, it belongs to the civilians. It doesn't belong to the base or anybody else. There was a speeder on there. Guy had probably had a drink or two. So the lieutenant just happened to be in a patrol car, one of the MP cars, and the guy speeds through the one set of stoplights which happened to be by the main gate. One of three sets. Anyway, he takes off after him. Chases him down. Of course, the guy just keeps on driving. Exits on Grand Avenue and beats his feet on into the town. And the lieutenant in hot pursuit with a military police sedan. Stops the guy. I mean, forces him to the side of the road. Gets out with his gun drawn and attempts to put him under arrest. Well, clearly outside of his jurisdiction, which the Oakland Police wasted no time when they showed up, shortly, in letting the lieutenant know that they'd handle it from here and thanks, it's time for him to get back on base. Well, that got him in a peck of trouble.

And then, it wasn't too much longer that they have a bowling alley there and people were bowling and an elderly gentlemen, retiree, was in there bowling and he collapsed in the ball area there. And, of course, they call the MPs. Here comes the lieutenant. Lo and behold, he's on duty again. And he works for a major and a full colonel and both of them had had their butts chewed pretty darn good from that first instance. So he goes in. Here comes the lieutenant, not a medical doctor or anything. No one had called for the medics at that particular time. He calls in, takes one look at the guy, and declares him dead, which he was not. And said, "Well, that's it. Everybody, close the bowling alley down," instead of having people rolling around this guy after he made the decision that the guy was dead. Boy, that caused the general to get into him and his boss. And it wasn't too long before the lieutenant was on orders for Korea.

03-00:42:12

Lage: So that's what happens to these—

03-00:42:14

Gowan: Well, not all the time. Sometimes they stick around. And then there was the court martial, or the attempted court martial of the club NCO.

03-00:42:23

Lage: Oh, yes. Tell me about that.

03-00:42:24

Gowan: This occurred on the second tour. They brought this sergeant up on charges of failing to maintain control of the funds. It was an operation that should have probably been looked into a long time before by the club officer, who was a lieutenant. Transportation lieutenant. He was a bit arrogant and they somehow cornered the poor old sergeant. It turns out when they had the court martial—

03-00:43:01

Lage: And you served on this?

03-00:43:03

Gowan: I sat on the court martial board. It was a general court martial. There was four of us and we had a lieutenant colonel who was the judge. It was conducted over at Presidio. So they get in there and one of the first guys they call is a CID, Army Criminal Investigation Division. Some of these guys are not like CIS on TV or anything like that. But they wear civilian clothes and they are absolutely the world's worst dressers. It's not uncommon to see brown shoes and blue pants, or white socks and a plaid jacket. They just stick out like a sore thumb.

So this judge calls a witness and this is the guy who did the investigation. And he comes up there and sat down. And when he sat down, he opened his coat up, I think, clearly to show everybody that he was carrying a weapon, which he was authorized to do. Judge didn't think so. He made him get up, go outside, take his weapon off, and come back and sit down. And from that

point on, it got real bad for that CID guy. They had lost control of the chain of control of evidence. Evidence probably was not the right word. So he testified. The judge then calls the club officer in. He testifies, and that was really pathetic, his testimony.

We're sitting up there, and there's a full colonel, myself, a captain, and a lieutenant. Well, I knew the colonel real well. He's on one end, I'm on the other. And the captain I knew well. The lieutenant later made brigadier general in the reserves. We talk about this when I see him every once in a while. Anyway, the judge was just not kind to the government's case. Clearly, they didn't do a thorough enough job. So he turned it over to us and we deliberated maybe for an hour. And, of course, both the colonel and I were for acquittal. We knew that the NCO was not culpable. But the club manager was a civilian, a lady, and the club officer, they would open the club up almost as a nightclub on the weekends, and they would charge two dollars a head. Or she was charging two dollars a head to let anybody off the street get in there.

03-00:45:39

Lage: Not necessarily military?

03-00:45:40

Gowan: No. And the lieutenant was turning a blind eye or running interference so the security guards would let them on the base. They had to drive about three-quarters of a mile over to the club. And the judge saw this. Both the colonel and I saw it. So we talked for a while and convinced the captain. It didn't take much with him. And the lieutenant took a little longer, that this was the evidence as we saw it, and we didn't think the government had a case. So we acquitted the NCO, and then the judge proceeded to chew out the CID, the club officer. And he made the statement. He said, "If anyone was brought up on charges, lieutenant, it should have been you. You were responsible and you failed to do your duties. You're not up on charges, nor will you be brought up on charges, but you better pray you never work for me."

03-00:46:43

Lage: That's pretty strong.

03-00:46:44

Gowan: Pretty strong language.

03-00:46:45

Lage: Now, that's not the lieutenant that got promoted?

03-00:46:48

Gowan: No. This guy happened to be a transportation officer, but he was about as good at his club management job as he was a transportation officer. We were starting to see some people who may have been war protestors or not in favor of the government, and went into the Army clearly as a vehicle for easy money. They had no intentions of staying. He did not {inaudible?}.

03-00:47:14  
Lage: He was one of them, you think?

03-00:47:14  
Gowan: I think he was.

03-00:47:16  
Lage: So he wasn't career?

03-00:47:17  
Gowan: No, he wasn't career. He was there to get his two years in, whatever he had to spend. Five years, I guess, and get out.

03-00:47:26  
Lage: Tell me more about this having civilians at the club. Was that against regulations?

03-00:47:33  
Gowan: They had kind of broadened it. In order to make the club viable, finish in the black every year, they—of course, served lunches. Breakfast and lunches and dinners there, and any of the civilian workers could come in. Any of the longshoremen. Anybody on the base could come in and eat there. So they decided to open it up a little bit for the younger people that were assigned to Oakland and the younger people that were around, be it Navy or Air Force. And quite frankly, this was common practice over at Alameda. And even to include the officers club. They could come in on the weekends and they'd have music for dancing. It was just a fun time. And that's what they were trying to do there. But this lady was into taking the money, chump money.

03-00:48:27  
Lage: So some of that two dollars went right into her pocket?

03-00:48:28  
Gowan: Right into it. If not all of it. Now, the NCO was there as a club manager. His duties included the beverages, stocking, making sure this was done. Bartenders showed up on time. And a lot of them would hire off-duty NCOs to be bartenders. It paid separate. I think she had asked that this person be hired. Person never showed up for work, yet continued to get paid. She would collect his pay for him. So she had some criminal—

03-00:49:00  
Lage: Did she get dismissed?

03-00:49:01  
Gowan: She did. She got in trouble. She was actually charged with theft. I forget how they worded that. Not grand theft. Probably would have been grand theft if they knew the exact amount. Of course, you don't know how many two dollars was collected. It's just a best guess.

03-00:49:20  
Lage: But what about the civilians that got on scurrying around the—

03-00:49:23

Gowan:

Well, they actually came through the gate, no problem. But they were waved through. They didn't have to show any badges. They'd say, "We're going to the club."

03-00:49:32

Lage:

And that was okay or was that—?

03-00:49:35

Gowan:

No. Really, they're supposed to show some form of identification. Some bases even collect that identification and give it back to you when you get back. Now, the {inaudible?} when they were there only contained officers and the town like facilities for the quarters that were co-located also on there. And the commissary. So there wasn't really a great danger of stuff being stolen. Maybe some damage, malicious mischief or vandalism or something like that. But not like they were actually in a warehouse area where goods were in it. They would not let them in there, I can tell you. There would be—

03-00:50:14

Lage:

That would be separately monitored.

03-00:50:15

Gowan:

And it was separate. It was on the same side of the street, but it was separate.

03-00:50:19

Lage:

In general, was theft a problem during a period?

03-00:50:23

Gowan:

Well, not so much from the civilians. I believe the longshoremen got away with quite a lot. In fact, I remember, the contract read that they had to be carried to and from the bus. They got their lunch hour. They had bus service for all this. The bus company at that time was a company called {Giton?} Transportation. And they run a legitimate business. But the longshoremen have got it ingrained in them they got to steal something on their shift or they just didn't get a day's work in. So occasionally, we would stop the bus. Have the MPs stop the bus, and then they would make them all get out and walk out the gate, and then they would come in and search the bus, and then the bus would go out and pick them up. Well, this one time they came through there. And I guess they picked fifteen or twenty pairs of work boots, a T-28 parachute, numerous flashlights, some boxes that actually had medals in them, like a meritorious medal or something like this. But they just left it on the bus. Well, if they don't catch you in possession of it, you're not guilty of anything. But that was one of the things.

As far as actual theft, yes, I think they did uncover some serious theft involving some drugs or controlled items, controlled substances that were medicines and things of this nature. But by and large, they stayed pretty much on top of that. Anyplace where there is money, cash changes hands, like the

clubs and the PXs and things of that nature, then there's always the possibility.

03-00:52:15

Lage: Sure. As in any community.

03-00:52:16

Gowan: As in any community, that's right.

03-00:52:17

Lage: Yes. Well, I think we should kind of wind up. You retired in eighty-eight. What kind of continuing connection do you have to the base?

03-00:52:32

Gowan: The military. Of course, I belong to several associations. The Army Special Forces Association, the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, VFW American Legion, and the National Defense Transportation Association, which is a recognized association that consists of a lot of retired officers and civilians that are designed to bring industry and government together, and it's about sixty years old. I belong to the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter and I've been the past president of that chapter. I was the past California State President and the Pacific Southwest Regional President.

03-00:53:23

Lage: Now, what kinds of things does that organization do?

03-00:53:28

Gowan: Well, they do a lot of things. Mainly, it's about education. Most of the chapters hold events and they will invite the public or members to come in. They'll have special programs that they come in and they build a fund for scholarships. And then every year, they give away the scholarships at the end of May or June. May, I guess it is. This chapter that's in the San Joaquin Valley here, which is anchored by the depot here, they give out something like \$23,000 worth of scholarships every year to not only high school students going into college, but older individuals who are taking skill sets to get jobs. Basically related to transportation logistics and now IT. That's a very big part of this stuff. So they do that. And National gives away scholarships also.

And then, at the national level, they'll be asked by the government. Various departments, like DOD, will ask the National Defense Transportation to do a white paper study on a subject and they receive national recognition. Every one of our forums that they hold—this year it was held in Reno, and that was last month. You will see assistant secretary of defenses, state transportation, homeland security, numerous four star admirals and generals from all over, and then the captains of industry will show up. The CEOs of different companies, and then the government folks show up. And normally there's twelve to 1,500 people for these—

03-00:55:18

Lage: So it's partly a networking opportunity.

03-00:55:21

Gowan: It is networking, and that worked fine with me, because I started a small consulting company. I had two partners and they opted out. And when they opted out, I made it an S-Corporation. And my consulting business consists of working with people who are doing business with the government, want to do business with the government, or are having problems, or want to meet someone. And I know just one heck of a lot of people at different levels, and I put them together. I've been doing this now for twenty years, a little over twenty years. And I'm in the process of trying to turn it loose and maybe become more semi-retired. More retired than semi-retired, I should say.

03-00:56:09

Lage: But you were young when you retired?

03-00:56:11

Gowan: Yes, I was forty-eight. But I've always been fairly fit and I still do, as I indicated, exercise three times a week, which includes a walk around, lightweights, and things of that nature. I still carry about 175 pounds.

03-00:56:29

Lage: And golf.

03-00:56:30

Gowan: And golf. I do that, too, yes.

03-00:56:34

Lage: I want you just to mention the retirees group that you seem to still be involved, going to the reunion.

03-00:56:40

Gowan: Yes. It is a group of former Oakland Army Base employees and civilians and military. And they have got together on a regular occasion and they hold these luncheons that are basically pay as you go. They'll talk about things in the past, who's passed on, who's doing what. What kind of jobs they're doing.

03-00:57:12

Lage: Staying in touch.

03-00:57:13

Gowan: And it's staying in touch.

03-00:57:15

Lage: Go ahead. Does your wife take part in that also?

03-00:57:19

Gowan: No. She seldom goes. Occasionally she'll go to the NDTA forums or to the local meetings. But she's never went up there. She still works for civil service at the depot. She worked at Oakland Army Base, I guess, for five or six years

in the latter part of my career. And then when they closed the base, she was picked up to come out here to the depot. Worked for a different agency. She actually works for the Defense Logistics Agency.

03-00:57:47

Lage: And say again the name of the depot. I don't think we put that on.

03-00:57:50

Gowan: Yes. It is the {Traceus?} Defense Depot. They call it DDJC, JC being San Joaquin County. Defense Depot San Joaquin. It's part of the Defense Logistics Agency.

03-00:58:06

Lage: Okay. So both of you have a connection with this military life.

03-00:58:11

Gowan: We do. We do.

03-00:58:12

Lage: Okay. Any final thoughts that you want to add? I think we've pretty well done it.

03-00:58:19

Gowan: I will still search for that tape.

03-00:58:22

Lage: Which is a history put together by—

03-00:58:26

Gowan: Yes. It's kind of a chronological history of the base as this man saw it. And he had access to some archives. He did a decent job on it. He narrates the whole thing. So it's good background for you. And then I'll look for as many of the old pictures. I'm sure there's some other instances that I can tell you about that would be interesting. And all part of what went on there.

03-00:58:56

Lage: Yes. I mean, that's what we're trying to get. Okay. Well, I thank you very much.

03-00:59:01

Gowan: Been my pleasure.

03-00:59:02

Lage: This has been very interesting.

[End of Interview]