

Lauren Cox

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1 Where are you originally from?

"I'm originally from Oklahoma"

2 What was your life like back at home?

"I was raised in a rural area of Oklahoma, mostly Indian territory. Growing up about 80% of the kids in my school were Indian." "Up through the 8th grade I was in a two room school house with 4 grades in one room and 4 in the other and most of the time I was the only one in my grade." "When I got out of the grade school and went to the big school 5 miles away and I was 1 of 9 in my graduating class."

3 What was it like being 1 of 9?

"It was all I knew. You know. I went from there to the University of Oklahoma going from about 9 to then around 12,000 students. That was quite a cultural shock for me but I made it."

4 Did you know from a young age what you wanted to do in the air force?

"I was always, growing up, interested in airplanes, aviation, and flying. Right after WW2, I was fascinated in what the air force did and pilots and airplanes. So they influenced me. I took ROTC, I was commissioned and went straight into pilot training."

5 How did your parents feel about you going into the air force?

"My dad asked me if I didn't think I could get a job. I said well no I think I would like to do."

6 How long did you serve?

"20 years, I was a career air force. After my first two tours of strategic air command in B-52's and I was actually in B-52's for my first 2 tours in the Vietnam area. Then I was converted to helicopters and I flew helicopters in special operations out of Thailand. After that I spent 15 more years in the air force most of the time was spent in non-flying jobs, mostly research and development. My one other flying job was a station in Hawaii. We were a recovery group for a national recon offices. Working with satellites, recon satellites, I was with the helicopter squad and we had a C130 squad and the C130 fixed wing airplanes would go and catch the satellites as they came down on a parachute. If they missed or the parachutes were defective or any were in the wrong spot and they got in the water then the helicopter guys went in and we picked them up."

7 Were you away from your family the entire time you were deployed?

"In Vietnam, oh yes. It was not an accompanied tour over there."

8. Did you ever send letters or get to talk to your family back and forth?

"I always wrote letters back every day or two and my wife wrote to me over there. This was before Skype and it was before a lot of communication so we could call commercial, but had to pay for it and I think it was something like \$25 or \$30 a minute. I never did that. Waited until I came home."

9. Did you ever miss them at one point and think about quitting?

"Think about quitting the Air Force? When I went into the Air Force after I graduated from the University and went to pilot training I incurred a six year commitment, active duty. Which meant I had to serve for at least 6 years. At the time I got near the end of my first 6 years, and it was natural that a few of my buddies said they would get out of the Air Force and the commercial airlines. About a few months before I came to a decision point, the airlines stopped hiring and a lot of my friends were told they had to wait and so they were selling shoes or digging ditches or whatever waiting, so I decided to wait. Then the next thing to happen to me I was called up and sent to a flying school which I didn't volunteer for, but I was too, and another 4 year commitment out of that and it was all added up. Next thing I knew I was over 10, so I said I would stay another 8 years and get my retirement."

10. What was your training like?

"Pilot training then, I don't know what it is now, was a year. There were two phases, a basic and advanced. Basically, we were flying Subsonic T-37 flight trainers. Basically learning how to hopefully not kill yourself while you are flying. Also, to do some basic maneuvers, formation flights, spins. Then advanced was in T-38's. They were Supersonic trainers and they performed like fighters and we then did more advanced training, a little, about 230-240 hours of flying time. I graduated and got my wings. I volunteered in B-52's, flew into B-52 training, which was nuclear weapon school, survival training. Then a couple months training in B-52's. Themselves including half a dozen flights or so, then off to my base, which was in Maine, to be a B-52 co-pilot."

11. What types of things were you living with every day?

"The family separation is hard on anybody and it's hard on the family, on the wives and kids. When you're gone they don't know what's happening to you, they are just there. The service takes care of you pretty much on base and if you need something there are people there that can help you, but husbands are gone. The Air Force said we needed a minimum of 12 hours rest time before flights."

12. Were you working with a lot of other people?

"B-52's I worked with my crew. I had a crew of 9 members and we flew as a unit. My time in helicopters I was in a squad of 20 or so pilots and flight engineers, and mechanics. I knew all the pilots and we were like a sports team."

13. Are you still in touch with your crew members?

"I was for a while but they have all eventually drifted away."

14. Can you explain the worst day of your time in service?

"No, I don't know. I didn't have any real terrible days. I mean, the helicopter got shot at once when I was on it, but I didn't get hit, one guy did, another almost did, and I almost did, but we made it out. It was more like you made it through that, okay now what's next?"

15. Were you at all prepared for that moment?

"No. How would you prepare for being shot at? I don't know how you would prepare to be shot. It's more like things happen and you react the way you are trained, hopefully you make it back."

16. Can you tell me about your best day?

"For all of us, it was the day we went home."

17. Can you tell me how it felt being able to see your family again?

"It was a reunion. Back home again, but I am still in the Air Force and back to the same job I left when I went over. And then a year later go back again."

18. What did you learn from being a pilot that you still use today?

"Stay calm, assess driving the situation, look ahead, anticipate what the other driver is going to do, what's going to happen and just don't panic, control the machine at all costs, all the time. Helicopter pilots can't have a lot of startle reflexes, if something happens, you jump and move your hands and the helicopter does the same thing. I've tried to learn to press that down."

19. If you could go back and change anything you did service, what would you change?

"I'm not sure. I had a good career and turned around and walked away from it to start a new career."

20. What was your daily routine while you were stationed?

"We flew, we were off for a little while, then flew again, off then flew. When you're off it's usually your completely off. They had some extra duties that we did, some you get a day off and rested. In the helicopter squadant it was a little bit of a different operation, but we had missions. They would happen half a dozen or 8 or 10 crews would go out and fly and do the mission and come back and there may be 3 or 4 days off. In these days off you trained. Took the airplanes up and went to training. Taking those crazy landing spots where you normally wouldn't try to put an airplane or anything really."

21. What exactly was a B-52?

"B-52 was a heavy bomber and are still flying them today. They were pretty old when I started flying. The B-52's mission was to carry atomic bombs, hydrogen bombs. You trained with weaponless planes around the US, never had weapons on board while flying around the US. Trained in the US then went on alert for 7 days. You lived in a building near the plane and waited for the siren to go off, and when it did, you ran to the planes, started the engines and got ready to go to war. When you got to the plane a radio

message that would say this an exercise hopefully they all were of course when I was in them; or you would hear the code words and go to war and you went to war.

22. When you were flying B-52's, were the aircrafts in Vietnam?

"No the aircrafts, most of them were stationed at Anderson Air Force Base in Guam. We flew C6 airplanes out of Anderson. We loaded, refueled from there, took off, rendezvoused with tankers mostly in Cadena. They would meet us over in the Philippines. Top off with fuel, fly off to Vietnam, drop the bombs, then come directly home into Anderson and go into the cycle all over again. It was a huge operation at Anderson.

23. Can you explain the refueling process?

"They would fill a Boeing airplane with aviation gasoline and a pipe or fueling boom came out under the tail and the B-52 flew up behind and plugged in up behind the pilots head."

Air refueling always in the B52 with a KC135 is a designation, the Boeing 707 was a conversion of a Boeing civilian airplane. They filled it up with gas, aviation fuel had a pipe, refueling boom came under the tail and out. The bomber flew up behind and plugged in behind the pilots. So you flew up in position and they plugged it in back there and transferred fuel in from their tanks into your tanks. We'd take an offload of 20-30,000 pounds and off we'd go.

The missions from Guam, that was the primary mission, that was about a 10-12 hour flight depending on what part of Vietnam you bombed or went to. The maximum gross weight for the B52 was 488,000 pounds and we took off at maximum gross weight. We climbed to altitude and about 3-4 hours later we'd meet with a tanker that came from another base. We would then do an in the air rendezvous, there was a maneuver that we used and they used to find us. We used to get behind them, 3 B52's in the sail, 3 tankers, go in get our fuel. They would leave and go home, we would go on and do the bombing. Then come direct back, we did not have to refuel on the way back. Always keep enough fuel so you can get back home.

A flight was 2 sails, they were called B52 formation for bombing. 2 sails, 3 aircraft each, 6 total airplanes.

I'll tell you a story about that, the primary way the B52's in the 1960's plan to drop bombs was called radar synchronist, big word, it means there was a bombardier radar navigator in the back of the airplane, who looked on a radar that showed what the ground looked like. The radar navigators, the staff and planners would find terrain objects that were easily identified on the ground. That were easily identified on his radar scope, those were then called and offset aim point, its very simple now but then it was kind of rudimentary at the time. You know where the offset aim point is and the coordinates put that in your computer, a cursor not a mouse, a cursor you ran to that target. Ok now I know where that point is and I know where I want to put the bomb at this point. The computer says ok, you fly to this heading to get there, it really sounds simple but the problem with the thing is identifying those ground offset aim

points. We're looking for a bend in a river, maybe a building or a cliff. Something that we can identify from any other cliff, building or river bend in the area. Those cues, when you're air born, change whether it's winter or summer or there's leaves on the trees or snow on the ground. Whether you're at 30,000 feet or 500 feet. So the radar navigator, their skill has to be able to identify those aim points, locate them, be able to put their cursor on the bomb and then drop the bomb. I told you earlier about dropping bombs. We really didn't drop bombs in the U.S. We would broadcast a tone on the radio. Beeeeep, on the radio and that tone would stop at the point that the system would have released a bomb would there have been one among board. There was then a ground crew with a radar that tracked our airplane, each airplane. Where they were flying, and using that position, the airplane's altitude, speed, and the path of the bomb, whatever bomb they were simulating dropping, would compute where the impact point would be and then would score that against where it was supposed to be. That's a long winded explanation and that's the way we practiced dropping bombs in the U.S. It didn't work that way in Vietnam. It's mostly jungle, not a lot of identifiable aim points. A few but not very many and so for that reason, most of the time in South East Asia, when B52s drop their bombs they reverse the system. That crew on the ground, instead of tracking the airplane in and seeing where you would have dropped and computing where the bomb would have hit, they now tell you when to drop the bomb, where to turn left, turn right, one degree left, half a degree right, ready, drop. Now I'll tell you the funnier story. Those ground crews could not actually tell exactly how far away you were from dropping a bomb, they just saw a turn on the radar scope. They were supposed to count you down "10, 9, 8, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1" and the word "hack". At the word "hack", the crew dropped the bomb. Bombs, we carried 108 of them on a B52. There were three airplanes in the sail, he's tracking the lead aircraft only. 2 and 3 know from their radar on board and how far behind they are. 2 and 3 position themselves half a mile or a mile behind and 500 feet left or right from the lead aircraft and have a stopwatch. You hear the lead aircraft get the word "hack" you know they have dropped their bombs. Start a stopwatch and you compute. He says I'm 21 seconds behind them so you wait 21 seconds and then you release yours and then the other one releases theirs. The ground guy doesn't really know all the time exactly just how far you are and it is always a caution for the bombardier. Radar navigators are the ones that pushed the button that dropped the bombs. They say "don't anticipate when he's gonna say drop the bombs" because sometimes he might go like this "10, 9, 8, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.....hack" and sometimes "10, 9, 8, hack". So you just wait for the "hack". Keep your finger of the button.

The B52, most of them, there were variations during the war, 2 basic iron bombs were carried. Iron bomb is a conventional weapon. They are a 500 pound bomb mark 82 still using the warhead. The B52 could carry 84 of those inside the airplane. There were then external under wing stations for 24 more weapons, total of 108. The other style of bombs were 750 pound weapons, those are 117. Almost all the time, as I can recall, we carried all 84 internal bombs and the external ones were the heavier ones. And they were all released in a ripple one after another with a timer inside the airplane. All 108 were dropped one at a time, but they were very quick. And we had a bomb release counter upfront and a light turned on when a bomb was released. It flickered back and forth when you are dropping the bombs but they'd land 100 feet apart on the ground.

People are always curious about they are fused. Both type of weapons had a fuse which was essentially a propeller on a screw. When the weapon fell through the air, the propeller would spin and withdraw a plunger. Then when it hits the ground, or whatever it hits, it collapses that plunger and sets off the bomb. The reason it works that way is you don't want to carry bombs in the airplane with fuses active. It might go off inside your airplane. So that was a way to delay actually arming the bomb until it had

fallen a number of feet. It was precisely calculated. I don't remember the number. There was a wire that went from the airplane, it was attached to the bomb rack down and through a hole in that fuse so that could not spin when it was in the airplane. And the bombardier had a switch you could throw to arm the bombs. That meant that that wire was going to be kept in the airplane. If he didn't throw that switch the wire fell with the bomb, and therefore it wouldn't spin and therefore it wouldn't arm. So there were two of those, one in those and one in the tail in each of the 750 pounders.

I was told most of the releases were like 500 feet of the target. That was the average for the starting bomb and they would trail out depending on the heading of the aircraft that's flying in. Bombing altitude in South Vietnam is down to about 32,000 feet. When we went north and into higher threat areas, we went up to around 38-40,000 feet.

Defensive measures we saw, well on the ground at 30,000 feet over South Vietnam there was nothing that they could hit us with. Small arms fire couldn't hit us, we were high enough that 37 and 57 millimeter anti-aircraft couldn't hit us. 85 millimeter anti-aircraft weapons on the ground at 30,000 feet could hit us, which is why we went to 38,000 feet. And we went north 100 millimeters could go to our altitude and we got intelligence of where 100 millimeters were and where surfaced air missiles were and we stayed away from those areas. I can recall once it was over Laos flying out of Udapow at night, I looked out of the window and I saw a row of maybe a dozen flashes on the ground and a few seconds later, I saw white sparkling fireworks going off in the air way below me and I thought "that was kind of pretty". Then I thought "Wait a minute, that's shooting at me". It was way below us so it was no threat. We had an electrical warfare officer on board as one of the crew members. The electrical warfare officer controls the chaff, the chaff is our radar reflective devices, it's mostly aluminum foil and it's cut in width length for the radar that it's going to jam. It's cut to a length with frequency of the radar. He had chaff he could dispense, he had I think 96 flares we had on board and the tail if it had an infrared missile that comes after us, he could eject flares that had the same heat signature as our aircraft, and he had a lot of jamming devices. I didn't know how most of them worked, that was his job that he could monitor radar from the ground, radar and radio signals from the ground and jam or repeat instead of letting the ground return from the aircraft. To show what's on the ground, he would broadcast his own return and make it look like the airplane was somewhere else.

The aircrafts were reloaded; crews didn't do that, there were ground crew that did that. There was a lot of maintenance that had to be done on an aircraft to make sure they would fly. Not just reload, not just reload the bombs and the bomb reloading was a separate ground crew. Explosive ordinance device people that you hear about that defuse the bombs in Iraq, those are the same people we had that reloaded the bombs there. They would drive them out on trucks, assemble them the bombs come without the fuses and tail fans on the back, clamp those on run over and run them up on the airplane. It's a little frightening at first when you see them come up with a flatbed truck full of 500 pound bombs and you see the guys up on the truck kicking them, letting them roll across the back banging them against each other. They said they're not going to go off unless they have a fuse in them. The standard joke over there is don't pay any attention to them unless you see one of them running, if you see one of those bomb guys running, try to run faster than he is. There were no "she" is doing that, at that time. There are now.

Interesting question was how do you feel being a bomber and dropping a lot of bombs, well we're doing a job you know. Hopefully what we're doing is keeping some of those guys down there on the

ground, god bless them all, alive because look at the statistics on B52s. The B52s are credited mostly for wiping out about a division of North Vietnamese troops.

Everything was a strategic air command. We were the crews that would have dropped a nuclear weapons on our enemies, in the 1960s and later. At this point you push a button and there they go.

This did not happen to me but I did hear the tapes. They recorded all of our conversations on the aircraft, in a cheap commercial tape recorder they bought somewhere. It connected to the intercom and they recorded everything so they could figure out what we did wrong, if we didn't do something correct. There was one B52 and it flew from Anderson, from Guam and announced to the crew or anyone else they had done electrical wiring repairs in the Bombay area and no matter what the crew did, as soon as the Bombay doors came open, all 84 internal bombs were going to drop. A bomb release in a B52, the bomb release sequence included a switch, you couldn't drop a bomb on a closed door, so in that circuit from when the signal goes to the bomb release part of it goes through a censor, that says are the Bombay doors open, so if they weren't it wouldn't release. This had been somehow, maintenance had done something wrong and it was set so no matter what happened they were going to release all the bombs. The crew, their recording everything and going down the checklist and they get to point where the pilot radar navigator has a control of the bombay doors and the checklist he calls up to the pilot, "pilot radar navigator opening bombay doors". The pilot has to check the hydraulic system, he has all the displays for the hydraulic system and he says, "yes your clear, meaning everything is ok up here. The bombardier says "Oh", and I won't repeat the word and they all went. The crew I'm sure could feel the airplane rattles a little as the bombs are going. I'm sure the pilot was hoping against hope, the pilot calls back, "what all went, the radar navigator says, "the bombs". The pilot says "well", and I won't repeat the word and says "well close the doors". Again that didn't happen to me.

I don't think so, the pilots are the ones who control the Air Force and I was a pilot. I did pretty well. After being in for a few years you learn you have some control over what your next assignment is. You can work with the Air Force Military Personnel Center at Randolph Air Force Base in Texas who make those assignments when it's time to go somewhere else. You can talk to them and sort of, if you know how to do it and who to talk to, and arrange where to go next. That's how I got my assignment in Hawaii and how I got a couple other assignments. Those were changes in directions, so I guess I did change direction mostly in the way I wanted to go.

Transition from B-52's to helicopters, before I get into that in depth I need to talk a little more about B-52's. There was a D-Model, that was a type of B-52 and those were most of the ones used in Vietnam and in fact the only ones used up until late in the war. There were units in the U.S. that flew those D-Models and those units flew both conventional and nuclear mission. They had the same alert I described earlier but they also had the conventional mission and they were rotated as a squadron, all of them for up to 179 days to Guam, to Anderson to fly those missions. Odd number, why 179 days, its less than 6 months, 6 months is 180 days. If you stay 180 days you get credit for a tour, if you stay 179 days you don't. You're on temporary duty so those guys went to war but they didn't get credit for going on the South East Asia tour because the rules were one South East Asia tour and then you don't have to go back again for one

year. But see, they go back 6 months, their home 6 months, go back 6 months, then home 6 months. You see, some of them did it 7-8 times. Now I was in a G model crew and we were only nuclear, but by 1966 they decided they didn't have enough D model crews to continue that. A lot of them were getting out of the service. So they decided they'd let some of us go over as replacements on an individual basis. My crew volunteered to do that, we were one of the first ones to go from my base. The first time as a volunteer, I was home about 6 months and then they decided to send my back again. My tours were only 4 months at a time and they sent us home after about 4 or 4 ½ months. I came back from the second one, went to an Air Force school and while I was in school, it was decided since I didn't have a combat tour yet, only having been in a B-52, they would give me one and it would be in a helicopter. I went through what was called conversion training. It was in Shepard Air Force Base in Texas. That's where they took all of us pilots out of C130's and B-52 tankers and transport aircraft and gave us about 30 hours in a helicopter to learn how to go up and down, back and forth, without killing people. A few hours in an H 3 which is a little heavier aircraft, and then we went to tactical training in Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina. H 53's, that's the big super jolly green and we flew those. In fact, some of the instructors I had on that training had been on the same raid when they tried to rescue the POWs. So that's how I got into helicopters.

If you know how to drive a car, do you know how to drive a truck? No. Is it gonna be difficult to learn to drive a truck? Maybe. If you're gonna have difficulty learning how to drive a truck in the first place, yeah. If not, maybe not so much. It takes about 5 hours of flight time to learn how to hover a helicopter. That doesn't mean you go out for a five hour flight, that means you're out for 15-20 minutes until the instructor gets tired of you trying to burn him up and then you fly something else. Then the next day you do it again. It's sort of like riding a bicycle. It's one of those things you convince yourself, "I'm never gonna be able to do this. I just can't do it." Then click, it happens and "ok, I can do it" and you move on.

I was special operations in Thailand. We did very secret, well I can read all about it on the internet so it's obviously not secret anymore. We had a couple of missions. One was in support of the CIA's army in Laos. We helped them haul troops around in the combat areas. The other mission was one with special forces guys on the Ho Chi Minh trail. It comes from North Vietnam through Laos and into Vietnam, it was a main supply route. We had a huge air war during interdiction on the Ho Chi Minh trail and we put in either road watch or prisoner snatch teams to go in and try to get intelligence on the trail.

I think we were all aware of how dangerous it was at the time but you know, you're young, everybody thinks they're bulletproof. It might happen to somebody else, it's not gonna happen to me. My squadron special didn't lose anybody the time I was over there. The other squadrons on base, and that wasn't a special operations base, in Thailand, we didn't have any real Air Force airplanes there. We had gunships and flare dropping aircrafts. We had forward air controllers that flew special missions around the trail. Along the Ho Chi Minh Trail they dropped sensors, acoustic and thermal systems to get intelligence on the road traffic on the trail. The information from those sensors on the ground were picked up from special airplanes that flew around. Those were supposed to be a drone airplane without a pilot but they had so much trouble getting the drones work that they had to put pilots in them and they flew those

QU 22's they called them. They were out of the base and they had a squadron that flew those. They were so quiet you couldn't hear them most of the time. They had a small engine and then they just went up and flew around. They relayed their information back to a big headquarters unit they had there. That analyzed the data and sent strikes against it.

Everybody has a big target on your back you know. We didn't have any markings on our aircraft. No U.S, no U.S.A.F. ,none of that. Since we were heavy lift we could carry a lot of people. My personal record was 65 and I heard one guy had 102. We could carry a lot of people so we were heavy and we were slower, so we weren't in and out of the small areas the way the others were. If I were wearing a hat I'd take it off right now.

A question about the one time we were mostly shot at, I'd been over there for, oh, maybe 2-3 weeks and we had a special mission that was going up into Loas. An instructor pilot took two of us new guys to go with him to Loas. The H 53 had a crew of two pilots normally, two flight engineer gunners. We had a mini gun out of one door and an M 60 out of the other. No M 60 actually , just a mini gun. Oh the way up we got diverted on the way to Loas. The Air Force was flying drones and one of them had crashed. They called us on the radio, they actually told us a little bit about it before we took off. They wanted us to go up where it had crashed, take out the sensor package and bring the package back with us. We flew to the area and it was on the side of the hill, oh and then they told us another H 53, a rescue airplane had gone up the day before and it had crashed there. Okay so we had gone up and found the drone on the side of the hill. The parachute, drone and then down at the bottom the helicopter upside down. It never occurred to us it stayed there over night without someone taking the parachute. That's because they wanted us to come back and just as we came into a hover over the drone, the bad guys, I don't know how many there were underneath us, got out from under the helicopter and started shooting at us. We took like 40-50 hits. One engine got hit, caught fire. One man in the back was hit in the leg, I had a bullet miss my foot about an inch. We took a fire extinguisher and kind of put the fire out on the engine that got hit. We left the area and flew back to the nearest base and landed and that was about it. After we left then came the fighters and they blew up everything.