ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

David Schoff

An interview conducted on

May 5, 2022

Interviewer: Dr. Bruce Hunt, Dr. Allison Huntley

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“Willian and Don Griffis Vietnam War Oral History Archive”
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Interviewer: Dr. Bruce Hunt, Dr. Allison Huntley
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HUNT: Okay, um, it is May 5th, 2022. It’s about 9:30 am. Um, my name is uh, uh, Dr. Bruce Hunt. I'm here with Dr. Allison Huntley and Mr. David Schoff. Uh, to do a- an interview for the William and Don Griffis Vietnam War Oral History Archive. Uh, and so to- to begin with Mr. Schoff, first, uh, what is your name?

SCHOFF: Robert David Schoff Jr.

HUNT: And when and where were you born?

SCHOFF: I was born on January, the 27th, 1945 in Monroe, North Carolina.

HUNT: And where did you grow up?

SCHOFF: Around the world.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: I'm an army brat so we moved when my dad got transferred. We spent a lot of time in Georgia. He was stationed at all three of the bases in Georgia at one time or another.

HUNT: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: Go overseas and come back, go overseas, come back type thing.

HUNT: Uh, could you summarize your connection to West Texas, when that began?

SCHOFF: It- first time I came to West- San Angelo was, uh, in June of 1970 when I was assigned to Goodfellow Air Force base to go to school and, uh, then I came back in 1981 to ’85 to teach at the school. And when I retired in 1989, we came back here because our children were here.

HUNT: When and where did you enter the armed forces?

SCHOFF: I first joined the- the Navy in June of 1963 at Fort Stewart, Georgia and, uh, then I joined the Air Force in October of 1967 at Coral Gables, Florida.

HUNT: Um, and what were your years of service?


HUNT: And that was all Air Force?

SCHOFF: No, 4 years Navy.

SCHOFF: Uh, 22 Air Force.

HUNT: And which military conflicts did you serve during?

SCHOFF: I served in Vietnam, and I also served in Korea. Uh, since the Korean Wars never ended, it’s still- we’re still technically at war with them.

HUNT: Yes sir. And this might be, uh, a tough question given your length of service, but, um, which unit did- units did you serve in, especially regarding your Vietnam deployment?

SCHOFF: Uh, the USS Coral Sea CVA 43 was the ship I was on, an aircraft carrier. Spent 3 years onboard her and 2 years of that was in the Gulf of Tonkin launching aircraft on attacks against North Vietnam. Then, joined the Air Force and I was deployed to Vietnam. I was airborne maintenance on the recon aircraft. Flew on C-130s and RC-135s. And, uh, we flew missions, uh, in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the Gulf of Tonkin area. We also flew missions in Korea.

HUNT: Okay, that's our block of basic questions, uh, getting a little bit more deeper background. Uh, first of all, why did you enlist, and what was your original training like as you recall?

SCHOFF: Why did I enlist? I was sick and tired of the United States Army.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: I had been in it for- since the day I was born until I was 18.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: And I just wanted to get away. 30 days after I graduated from high school I was in the Navy.

HUNT: Wow.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: It’s the truth. [Laughter]

HUNTLEY: Knew where you were going.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNT: Went into one branch to escape the other.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: Exactly.
HUNT: Uh, do you recall, uh, your training your- and uh-

SCHOFF: Yeah, boot camp was long for us in the Navy, it was 12 weeks, uh, where the Air Force was only six or eight, in the same with the Army at the time. So, uh, it was an extensive- We were exposed to a lot more than the other services because one of the things you had to do- if you didn't know how to swim you did by the time you got out of boot camp or you didn't get out of boot camp.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: You know, that was one of the things that was really necessary being on a ship, you know.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: You’re in the middle of the water- there ain't no walk away.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: And, uh, it- it was tough because the- I- none of the other branches, uh, require you to do your own laundry and we did. We- we had- they issued you a bucket and a big scrub brush and they had these, uh, marble tables with faucets on them and you scrubbed your jeans and your whites. The only thing you didn't have to do was your blues, but I was going through in the summertime, so it was all whites and jeans.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And, uh, you learned to scrub them and rinse them and hang them out to dry. They- they- that was part of your inspection. They gave you little pieces of rope about six inches long with, uh, metal knurls on the end. They were called clothes- uh, they were clothes-ties.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And you would tie your clothes to the clothesline.

HUNT: Hm.

SCHOFF: And you had to tie them with square knots and everything. And you were inspected. The ends had to be the same sub-length on each side, you know.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]
HUNT: Hm.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: So, you know, nobody else- the Army doesn't do that, the Marines don't do that, you know. The Air Force sure doesn't do that.

HUNT: Oh.

SCHOFF: So, it- it was interesting. 'Course I was already semi-prepared being- having grown up in the military. It- a lot of that stuff was not new.

HUNT: Mhmm. [Chuckle]

SCHOFF: You know. You already knew about a lot of it.

HUNT: [Chuckle]

HUNTLEY: Were there a lot of other people who were children of servicemen and women?

SCHOFF: Uh, you know, there were quite a few of us but there were more civilians than there were military dependents, uh, in boot camp. You could tell those who were, uh, dependents because we kind of stood out.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: You- we more or less had a clue while the others didn't.

HUNT: Did that lead you to be more of a leader?

SCHOFF: Yes, it did, I wound up as being a company, uh, the recruit company commander.

HUNT: Hm.

SCHOFF: While I was in- in boot camp and-

HUNT: This would have been in '63?

SCHOFF: 1963.

HUNT: Uh, so, that's an interesting time in American history.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]
SCHOFF: Yes, it is, I was in tech school. I graduated from boot camp and I was in tech school, uh, on the 22nd of November when that- when everything happened. And, uh, came in over the speaker system in the schoolhouse, uh-"President Kennedy has been shot" and you could have heard a pin drop on that base.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: I mean it was silence everywhere and then they dismissed us and sent us back to the barracks and that was the end of the day right there.

HUNTLEY: Mhm.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: Uh...

HUNT: Wow. So, uh, I guess inclusive of before and after that moment, what was your conception of the United States?

SCHOFF: [Sigh] Well, I had met President Kennedy, uh, in October of ’62-

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: -during the missile crisis. So, uh, my dad- he came and visited all the- they did a review of the soldiers. They had brought, uh, trainloads and trainloads of soldiers to Fort Stewart, Georgia, which is just north of the Florida state line, just in case they had to deploy them. And there were trainloads of them. And there were so many people they didn't have barracks to put them in so they left them on the trains and parked them on the sidings. And, uh, when they- my dad was an MP, of course, they provided, uh, security and, uh, a bunch of us high school kids were able to meet-

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: -the President while he was there. A moment that I'll never forget, you know, it was- it was something- something else.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: But, uh, he was the second president I met. I got to meet Eisenhower-

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: -when he was- uh, back when we were at Fort Gordon.

HUNT: Wow.
SCHOFF: So, we got to see two of them.

HUNTLEY: Have you met any other presidents?

SCHOFF: Uh, let me see. I saw Reagan. I saw Carter. I didn't shake their hands or nothing, but I saw 'em because they came to the bases where I was at.

[Paper rustling]

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Especially when, uh, Reagan came when we were bringing the remains back from- I was stationed in Honolulu, and remains all came into, uh, the lab there- the forensic labs there. So, we all- whenever the president came in, we worked on the flight line right there so you're- you're down near the- see what's going on.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNT: Wow. So, it sounds like your impression of the country was probably very positive?

SCHOFF: Uh, I wouldn't say it was real positive.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Because there was a lot of negative- negativity that, uh, none of- did away with the good points.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Especially when I returned from Vietnam on my first deployment.

HUNT: Um, we- we want to, uh- uh, explore that a little bit and get the before and after. So, was it- did it- did it change? Uh.

SCHOFF: Tremendously.

HUNT: Okay. H-how would you characterize that change?

SCHOFF: I lost faith in the United States and the people.

HUNTLEY: So, what do you think would be like the before picture?

SCHOFF: The before picture was, well you had to grow up in the '50s to understand.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]
SCHOFF: It was- it was a time of peace, and it was a time of the- America was great.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And the- and the people had a positive attitude and up until 1965, I had a great attitude.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: Uh, after that my attitude in the military- I still had a great attitude about the military. Don't get me wrong there, I never turned my back on our military and- but I just lost fight in the faith in the civilian communities.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: Totally, I mean totally. I wanted nothing to do with them.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: Unless it was with these.

HUNT: So, it uh- to understand why maybe we can explore a little bit about how you felt about your unit's mission while you were overseas.

SCHOFF: Well, my first deployment I was on board the ship and we deployed on December 7th, 1964. Things were calm, cool, and collected. There was nothing going on, we sailed to Hawaii. We were there for two weeks. We left Hawaii. We went to Japan, enjoyed our time in Japan for about a week or so, and from there we went to Hong Kong, spent a week in Hong Kong. You know, at sea for a week and then in port for a week. Normal peacetime deployment, we were on- we left Hong Kong we were on our way to Manila. We were supposed to anchor out in Manilla Bay and get two weeks, uh, shore leave in, uh, in Manila. We never made it to Manila, we were in the middle of the night, we changed course and sailed for Subic Bay and, uh, pulled into Subic Bay at night- which, I never had an aircraft carrier mo- pull into port at night. And it just wasn't something that it did. And the sun come up and they were loading and loading and loading and loading, everyone was restricted to ship. No one was left off- allowed off. We had no idea what was going on, it was just- everything was communication silent. And, uh, we finished up and we sailed out of Subic, and once we were out half a day, the admiral came on the INC speaker and told us about the Turner Joy and the Maddox and we were responding to what was going on down in Tonkin Gulf, and we sailed straight south. And on February the 7th in 1965, the Coral Sea along with two other aircraft carriers and aircraft- US Air Force aircraft from Thailand launched the first air attacks against the, uh, port. Uh, so I don't know why. And, at that point, we knew we were engaged in something, and everyone's attitude was up, we were doing a job we were trained for. This was the first shots fired in anger from the ship, she was launched in '47- or commissioned in '47, it never fired a shot in anger, we- we started it.
SCHOFF: And we were there from then until we were supposed to come home in June, but the ship that was supposed to relieve us, was having problems and didn’t make it so we were extended an additional five months and we came home in November. We were gone for 11 months and that was the longest deployment by an aircraft carrier at that time.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And, uh, everything was fine until we got home.

HUNT: So, there was eleven months?

SCHOFF: Eleven months.

HUNT: And did you view your mission as a sort of securing regional order?

SCHOFF: We were doing what we were trained to do and what our country, uh, leaders had told us that they wanted done. We were following orders and doing what we were proud to do our job.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: I’m still proud of the job we did.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

HUNT: Um, yes sir. Thank you. Um, as far as in the region, uh, you’re on ship so did you have any, uh, interactions with any local, um?

SCHOFF: Uh, we got within, uh, ten miles of the shore.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Uh, we did not receive any fire at us, mainly because we were well protected. Uh, between us and the shore were a bunch of tin cans and cruisers, so.

HUNT: Mhm.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: And they were laying fire, so no one was shooting back at us. They protect the carriers quite well.

HUNT: Wow.
SCHOFF: Uh, but we did have, uh, top caps up, F-4s flying all the time to protect us just in case any aircraft came.

HUNT: Mhm. Okay. Um, did you receive any special recognitions for your service, um, uh, dur- after the deploy- deployments?

SCHOFF: The first deployment?

HUNT: Yes.

SCHOFF: Oh, we- we received the- the first half of our deployment, we received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal because there was no Vietnam service medal at that time.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And then the next deployment we did, I got the Vietnam Service Medal and the Vietnam Campaign Medal. We also received the Navy Unit Commendation at that time and the, uh, National Defense Service medal.

HUNT: Wow. So, how- how many deployments did you do?

SCHOFF: I did two deployments on a carrier.

HUNT: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: The first one was eleven months, the other one was nine months. One was '64-'65 the other was '66-'67.

HUNT: Okay. Good, I think- I think you already probably said that I- I'm taking it all in.

SCHOFF: I- I don't remember if I did.

[All Laugh]

HUNT: Okay, um. Uh, do you recall in particular any interesting military technology or communications technology that you used in the service?

SCHOFF: Well, I was an electronics technician in the Navy. I worked on radar and, uh, spent a lot of time working [Laughter] on all the different radars and the radar repeaters and everything else that's on the ship. And because comm and radar, were- you have two different career fields or two different sections of the career field, uh, at that time: uh, comm and radar. And when you- you're either designated one or the other until you- 'til you make it, uh, first class petty officer and then you just become an ET, you're for both. And, uh, but true to life, if you don't have any work to do on a radar and the comm guys are snowed under, you know what you’re gonna be doing.
HUNTLEY: [Chuckle]

SCHOFF: You're gonna work on the radios too.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: You know, so you- you got broad, uh, coverage of area of technology to learn.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: I was able to go to school on several different pieces of equipment that was interesting, to say the least.

HUNT: Uh, may- maybe could you elaborate on, did it seem cutting edge at the time, was it over-complicated, or?

SCHOFF: Well, actually the one that I went to school at- at Johns Hopkins in Silver Spring, Maryland was the Pathfinder Radar which was a- a Navy- aircraft carriers were having trouble coming into port, several carriers had run aground at different places-

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: -because all of your radars were surface search and air search and things like this. Well, your surface search radar could not see anything that was within 20 miles of you, it had to be 20 miles away to see it.

HUNT: Oh.

SCHOFF: So, it came out with- this was an off-the-shelf civilian, uh, boats used it. This Pathfinder Radar. It was just a little radar that could see five, ten miles out.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: And then that's what we used to come into port with, but we had-

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: They didn't have it until somebody needed it, you know.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: They just never thought about it, you know. And so, it was something else, it wasn't really cutting edge, but it was necessary, uh.

HUNT: Wow.
SCHOFF: We did have, uh- they brought in a new sys- radar system for pilot landing, uh, assistance, uh, where it had mode- four different modes of operation. We got it fir- we- we were one of the first carriers to get it and we got it operating in mode one and two, but we never got it to three and four- in- in mode four it would lock onto the airplane and the pilot could bail out, it would land the airplane.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: But we never got it to that point before I got out.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: You gotta understand that the computers we were using, uh, would fill this floor.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: You know, those bookshelves there, uh, like that would- drawers, you know, drawers about this wide would just fold out like a half- like a quarter circle or a half circle.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And it just full of tubes, you know, just tube after tube after tube. It was all- it was all tube technology.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: Uh, I started out in electronics actually while I was in high school around '61, uh, working on, uh, stuff at- at home and with, uh, radios and things like that. And, uh, everything was tubes and crystals and things like this, and then I- and then when I retired from- when I totally retired in nineteen- in 2013, I had been over 52 years working in electronics.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Seen it come a long way.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: From tubes to microminiaturization.

HUNTLEY: I don't know if there would be a more interesting 52 years to be in that type of work. [Laughter]

SCHOFF: It was extremely interesting, uh, especially after I- after I joined the Air Force because I chose a career field in the Air Force, uh, electronic warfare was my career field.
HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And it was cutting edge, everything was cutting edge.

HUNTLEY: Mhm.

SCHOFF: I worked on B-52s first and then I went to, uh, security service where I was working on airborne platforms. I was airborne maintenance, taking care of the equipment on the aircraft as we flew missions. And, uh, flew missions all over the world- intelligence gathering missions. And everything we had was cutting edge, all of our test equipment was cutting edge. After I left security service, uh, I was working on some older equipment, and, uh, I got a chance to go to, uh, Atlantic City, New Jersey, and work with a team from MIT that was building a new MTD radar system.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And, uh, as we were in there working- working- they were working and I'm observing and everything, and one of the guys started using a piece of test equipment, he was having a problem with it. I says, "Wait a minute," I says- went over and showed him how to use it. And he says, "You've seen these?"

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: I said, "Yeah, we've been using them for the last 6 years." "No this is brand new cutting technology," "Well, it is for you guys."

[All Laugh]

SCHOFF: But, yeah, we got a lot more new stuff than the other guys did. Electronic warfare was a- there's so many facets to the career field, you know. You've got the active side where B-52s, where the jam signals you know, and your dropping chaff and that. And then you got the, uh, passive side which is where you're doing listening and recording and looking, you know, and all the intel side of it.

HUNT: Mm.

SCHOFF: And, uh, you get into everything.

HUNT: Wow. Well uh, sounds like we could go for an hour just talking.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNT: Uh, shifting gears a little bit but we're still thinking about, uh, the deployments-

SCHOFF: Right.
HUNT: -and your unit. Uh, what were race, uh, relations like, or, uh, and or gender relations like?

SCHOFF: Well, we didn't have any women on board.

HUNT: Yeah.

SCHOFF: Back then they didn't have women onboard ships, so there were no problems there. Uh, we had no, obviously, you had no openly gay people, you know, that wasn’t- wasn't taught already. Uh, actually an openly gay person would have been treated no different than a, uh, person who had bad hygiene.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: They just about treated them the same, you know. A person with bad hygiene, if they didn't take a shower, we'd give them a shower. And uh, w- with a scrub brush. Make sure they knew they were clean.

HUNT: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: You know, but that was li- I mean, when you live in a space this size, you'd have uh, three-six-nine-twelve-twenty-four people-

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: -sleeping in a space this size.

HUNTLEY: Mm.

SCHOFF: Three racks high, you'd have one rack bolted to the wall there, in the middle you'd have posts with racks on each side and then a rack on the wall here. So, you know, you’re in close quarters, you gotta take a bath.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

SCHOFF: People don't want to smell you, you know. Race relations, we didn't have a problem. Uh, in our- on our ship, we- we didn't- they had them years following us in '68 especially they had problems-

HUNT: Ah.

SCHOFF: -with what was going on in Watts and places like that, you know. But, uh, in '64-'65 we didn't have any problems with ‘em.

HUNT: Mhm.
SCHOFF: With that kind of thing. Uh, we had- in the electronics area- in our area, we didn't have a whole lot of black people. I remember two, uh, but we- and I only remember one Hispanic and then, uh, and our clerk was black, but they didn't treat anybody- they didn't get treated any different than anybody else.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: They were one of our cr- they were- you’re tight on the ship.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: You have to be.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And you-you'll bicker, you'll argue against- about- with each other but don't anybody else step in cause if they do-

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: -it's everybody going in then, you know. We take care of our own. We can have our own family squabbles but, you know.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

HUNT: Do you- do you recall, uh, discipline on the ship being pretty strict, or?

SCHOFF: It was- it was strict, but it was con-consistent.

HUNT: Yeah.

SCHOFF: They didn't waffle, it was- it- this was the rule, and you followed the rule. You break the rule, you get punished.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: You know, and- and so it was always there, it wasn't something that was here and gone- here today and gone tomorrow type thing.

HUNT: So, it sounds like people pretty much played by the rules for the most part.

SCHOFF: You played by the rules.

HUNT: Yeah.

SCHOFF: If you didn't, you got punished.
HUNT: Hm. I wonder if you have any memories about, any examples of that, the next question’s more broad, uh, what are your most vivid memories of your time in service?

SCHOFF: Oh, my vivid...

[All Laugh]

SCHOFF: Actually, my most vivid memories- memories of time in service are of all the countries that I visited.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: All the different cultures that I got exposed to. The foods that I got to eat out there.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: That was something else to learn, you know. You to- get to eat the foods in the different countries. There are countries I won’t eat food from.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: Once tried-

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: -you don't want to do it again.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: It’s just, can’t do it.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: But most other countries there's, you know, the food's very good. When I- When I was in the Navy, I got to go to almost all the countries in the Pacific, in the Pacific Rim.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: You know, Taiwan and everything, all- Hong Kong, Japan, Philippines, uh, on down south that way. You know, just visit you know, you got to spend 5-6 days in each country, it was- it was good you know. Now when I joined the Air Force, why I really got to see places then ‘cause when I went into the airborne program, we might be stationed somewhere but that didn't mean that that's where we were at.
HUNTLEY: Mhm.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And uh, when we were in the 130s we were stationed in Japan, but we flew missions out of Korea and out of, uh, Vietnam and out of Thailand and were landing- we would land in Okinawa and Hong Kong or Taipei or wherever we needed to, you know. And here I am visiting the Pacific Rim all over again and then when I went into the 135s, uh, I was stationed in Omaha, Nebraska and, uh, didn't spend a lot of time in Omaha because our forward operating locations was Athens, Greece, Mildenhall, England, uh, Eielson, Alaska, Kadena, Okinawa and, uh, Hawaii.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: So.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNT: All of it.

SCHOFF: I'm- I'm seeing the world and, you know, when I came back here to Goodfellow in '81, I was on the inspection team, and we went to- all over the- we made four trips a year. Uh, North-Northern- Northern Pacific trip which was Alaska, Korea, and Japan. Our Southern, which was Hawaii, Okinawa, Thai-Philippines, and Thailand, and other odd places in between. And then we did our- our mid-UK which was the, uh- all around the mid- Spain, Italy, Greece, Crete, in that area.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And then, and- England, Scotland, and Wales. And, uh, then we also did, uh, our fourth trip was Germany. Just, huh, so many bases in Germany, that was a- a full month trip all by itself.

HUNT: Wow. [Laughter]

SCHOFF: So, I saw a lot of the world at that point, you know. And I- I just- those were my real vivid memories. Now, there's also memories of the equipment and the people that I worked with. Uh, we were- people that I- when we were in Korea, we'd go over there for two or three weeks and we- three or four of us were good friends and we would go sightseeing. And, uh, we were stationed at Suwon because Osan's airfield was shut down. And, uh, we got together, and we made uh- took- we walked the top of the old wall around the city of Suwon which took us a full day to do.

HUNT: Wow.
SCHOFF: It was un- I mean, it was unbelievable and the four of us that went- we- we- we still talk- two of us still talk about it because there's only two of us left but, you know, really something else things like that. The sightseeing that we did, the missions that we flew, those stick out in my head.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Uh, on the ship when I was in the Navy, it was air ops twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The only time we had off usually was rope yarn- rope yarn Sunday which was Wednesday afternoon.

HUNT: Yeah.

SCHOFF: Kinda shut things down, that's something the Navy does to give you a chance to get your laundry done, to repair, that's why they call it rope yarn, you know, sew buttons on things.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: And do things like this, you know. And- but other than that, and- and if missions come up rope yarn Wednesday went by the wayside, you went ahead and flew the missions.

HUNT: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: You know, uh, in the Air Force, uh, we had a- pretty good accommodations for n- I remember the Vietnam veterans’ organization here. I really get- feel for the guys who had- were in the jungle. Uh, I understand their PTSD from what they talk about and what they saw, and what they went through. I just pray- I was just thankful to God that I didn't have to be in the jungle. I was over the jungle, but I was- I wasn't in it. Uh, that doesn't mean that we didn't get experience- get exposed to things just almost as bad as some of the things they were. Seeing our friends killed, uh, we never lost a C-130 recon bird during all of the Vietnam conflict, and we never lost a RC-135 at that time. We did lose quite a few C-47s.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: Uh, which I had a lot of friends on those.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And the last one was over Laos just before the end of the war and that was- all- all hands were lost in that. But, uh, it’s something that you don't forget.

HUNTLEY: Yeah.

SCHOFF: It’s- It’s inside of you.
HUNT: Did, um, did any of these experiences, uh, factor into your decision to go into the Air Force from the Navy?

SCHOFF: No.

HUNT: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: Uh, my decision to go in the Air Force instead- uh, after I got out of the Navy.

HUNT: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: Uh, depended on whether or not I wanted a family or not.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: My wife gave me that decision.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: Your- you can do whatever you want but you will not go back in the Navy.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: I already knew I wouldn't like gonna go in the Army or the Marines, so, you know, I chose the Air Force.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And I enjoyed- It was a good career; I will not knock it at all.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Uh, I had a good run, I enjoyed it.

HUNTLEY: Huh.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: I liked my job and I think that was the biggest thing. I enjoyed what I did. I worked on a lot of different airplanes, uh, in the Air Force I started out on B-52 bombers, working in electronic warfare there and from there I went into the recon program with the C-130s, the 135s, the EC-121s, and the C-47s.

HUNT: Mhm.
SCHOFF: And, uh, then from that I went to, uh, the EB-57s which were you did, uh, we fly our planes up over the pole and try to penetrate back in trying to test the dew line and the radars and things.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: We were doing, uh, what we call ORI, Operational Readiness Inspections, on the radar system itself.

HUNT: I see.

SCHOFF: And that was enjoyable, and while I was there, I was assigned to the EF-111 Project which was the airplane that was supposed to replace the EB-57. Spent a year in school at Long Island at Roman Aircraft and then I spent another year, uh, on the, uh, operational test program.

HUNT: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And then from there I went to T-33s. [Chuckles] Providing the flight would, uh, electronic warfare pods and, uh, chaff pod on one side and chaff pod on the other side to provide training- EW training for the International Guard.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: And I did that for three years in Hawaii training the Hawaiian National Guard.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: Then I came here to teach for four years and then I went almost totally out of my career field in a way. I was still in an electronic warfare position, but I was, uh- at the time I was a nine-level, so I was a supervisory level.

HUNT: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And so instead of being a 328X3, I became a 32899 which means you cover all the 328 career fields.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: You’re a supervisor now.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And so, I wound up as the specialist flight chief for an A-10 squadron.

HUNT: Wow.
SCHOFF: And because I was the only nine-level they had, I became a line chief because none of their crew chiefs were nine levels and you had to be a nine-level to sign off the aircraft exception release to allow them to fly.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: So, I wound up doing a job that I was- had never thought about training for but I learned real fast.

HUNT: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: And I spent 4 years working A-10s before I retired.

HUNT: Wow. Um, uh, pivoting now to, uh, back to civilian life, did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

SCHOFF: The first time yes, the second time no.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Uh, because I guess we kinda went around this, because of what happened in- when I came back from my first deployment. I had a very negative outlook when I got out of the Navy, and it proved a po- a positive thing that it was- I wasn't wrong. It was actually there.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: But, uh, when I returned from Vietnam in 1965 from our first deployment, our ship was homeported at Alameda, California.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Alameda, California is on an island- Island Alameda, in San Francisco Bay right next to Oakland.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Come off- come out into the town of Alameda, the main street goes under the estuary, and up into Oakland. And if you stay on that street all the way down to the end and up to the top of the hill, you’re at Berkley.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: Our reg- our welcome home came from Berkley. Not something that I would recommend anybody ever have to do. I was spit on. I had paint thrown on me. I had urine thrown on me.
SCHOFF: I have no love for Berkley whatsoever and they- nothing in this world they will ever do to change my mind.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: But when I got- and when I got out of the Navy, I went to Florida, moved my family to Florida. I had a job waiting on me, I went to work at- at Cape Canaveral. I went to work first of August, the first of October the company I worked for lost a contract, the new company got the contract. I didn't have a 90-day probationary period finished; I lost my job. Three months later, I joined the Air Force because everywhere I went- "Are you a Vietnam veteran?" "Yes." "We can’t use you."

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: And that was everywhere you turned. And after being turned down for jobs I- my family had to eat and that was one of the major decisions to go back in the military.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Coming from a military family, my family's been in the military going all the way back to the Revolutionary War and I even have a cousin that died at the Alamo, so, I’m a- I come from a long military line and I’m proud of it.

HUNT: Yes sir. Um, thank- thank you and your family for all of your service. H-how- how did your service, uh, personally, uh- I mean your own individual experience influence or affect your family?

SCHOFF: Oh, well, we moved a lot.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Uh, when the kids were younger it wasn't so much but when they got up into- in- into junior high and high school it made a difference.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Now, we were fortunate enough that I got an assignment- well, I volunteered to come to Goodfellow as an instructor which was a guaranteed four-year assignment.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

HUNT: Wow.
SCHOFF: And, uh, during that four years, my youngest one finished up through, uh, graduated out of Glenn and my oldest one graduated from, uh, Central. Of course, he had started his high school in Hawaii at Radford in Honolulu, right outside of, uh, Pearl Harbor.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: Uh, he wasn't happy when we left there with two years left to go in high school, he didn't last two years at- at, uh, Central.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: He would have preferred to do them at Radford.

HUNT: [Laughter] Of course.

SCHOFF: You know, to go from Hawaii to West Texas.

[All Laugh]

HUNT: It’s a shock.

SCHOFF: A big difference. He was a surfer, you know, so

HUNTERLY: Oh, wow.

SCHOFF: Wasn't a lot of surfing in West Texas.

HUNTERLY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: Uh, the youngest one at that time, ‘course he was in, uh, elementary school and, uh, we came back here he went to Santa Rita and from there he went to- to Glenn and, uh, as he graduated out of the eight grade, we got orders to England.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: So, we went to England, and he did first three years of high school in England, and he was really happy. Now he was really upset with me when we left England and we were going to Arizona.

HUNTERLY: Ah.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Uh, he had done his junior year, all he had left was his senior year, why can’t we stay in England? I tried to volunteer, they wouldn't let me, you know. And, uh, so, he, uh, he got to Tucson there and he was a very- i-irate little individual.
SCHOFF: Until he went to school and, uh, found out in the first three days he was there, there were like seven or eight other guys- other people from England.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]  
SCHOFF: “Because of his dad- all of our dads worked A-10s.”

HUNT: Oh, wow.

SCHOFF: You know we were- that's the only thing we had on the base was A-10s and Tucson was an A-10 base.

HUNTLEY: Mhm.

HUNT; Oh.

SCHOFF: So that was- you know, you only had like three bases in the US that had A-10s, your choice- you know, your chance of being in the same- with the same people is pretty high, you know.

HUNTLEY: [Laughter] Did he know those people or did he just?

SCHOFF: Oh, yeah.

HUNTLEY: Oh, okay.

SCHOFF: He knew them, the first thing that he did when he come home that day, he was all smiles and everything, "Dad, Dad, guess what-"

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]  
SCHOFF: "Cruz is here."

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]  
SCHOFF: A friend of his, Cruz Serta, they were best friends, you know. “Cruz is here” “Well, things are looking up,” you know.

HUNT: [Laughter]


SCHOFF: But you know, that's- that was- and the fact that my wife- I was - I was deployed a lot.
HUNT: Mhm

SCHOFF: Over my entire career. Uh, being airborne you're gone - we don't fly missions in the U.S. You know, you're gone. But we were gone for two, three weeks, four weeks at most. Back home for a month and then you'd be gone for 2-3 weeks but-

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: - it was repetitive you know, you were going and going and going. Even out of Tu- out of here you know, I mean when I was here, I was gone four big trips a year and then we're all the time going down to San Antonio for, uh, three days or four days for a conference or, you know, whatever.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And, uh, so- but I thought- my wife and I kind of figured it out, uh, when we got married because I did my first deployment right after we got married and so in the first three years of our marriage, I was gone almost two of them.

HUNT: Oh, wow.

SCHOFF: So, she- she was kind of used to it.

[All Laugh]

HUNTLEY: Sounds like it.

SCHOFF: And- I don't know, we have a, we had a strong marriage, a very strong marriage, uh, up until 2017 when she passed away. Uh, we had been married for 52 years at that point and I miss her.

HUNT: Yes, sorry for your loss.

SCHOFF: Well, pancreatic cancer, there's no chance. It's a death sentence.

HUNT: Mhm. Um, as far as, um, communities in West Texas, um, how do you think they, uh, treat returning veterans?

SCHOFF: I think San Angelo is one of the best places to go.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: No doubt in my mind at all. San Angelo treats veterans better than most every place I've ever been.

HUNT: Mhm.
SCHOFF: And I've been in the military all my life.

HUNT: It says a lot. Um, how about going the other way, how- do you think that returning veterans have had an impact on West Texas?

SCHOFF: Well, I'm sure they do, I mean I'm sure just right here in San Angelo the- the number of veterans that, uh, retire here that are not necessarily from San Angelo. I mean, that schoolhouse out there brings a lot of people here that wind up retiring here.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: And out of all those retirees, uh, they have a positive effect on San Angelo as well as San Angelo having a positive effect on the veterans.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Uh, you have veterans involved in all these different programs, uh, all over the place. I mean, I know I'm involved in a lot of stuff and, uh, keeps me very busy.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: But right now, the honor flag is number one, its- it's really pushing buttons and keeping us really busy. But, uh, I'm involved with the Vietnam Veterans and with the, uh, All Vets Council and all that and I was- when I was here in the '80s I was involved with the Boy Scouts, my- my two boys were in scouts.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: I was, uh, assistant district commissioner for several troops here in town, and then in 1985 I was selected as the district commissioner for the Amani Trail district, and I was a district commissioner for about eight months and I got orders, and had to leave.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: But I- I was, the, uh, all your- all your, uh, volunteer functions- uh, places that people volunteer for, I think you'll find, uh, the military, active and retired, are- are really involved in everything that's going on in the city and in the county.

HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

SCHOFF: And, uh, those of us who decided to make this our home, consider this home. I mean, it's- this is it, this is where we live, and we take care of our home.
HUNTLEY: Mhm-hm.

HUNT: Well, we’re- rounding, uh, towards our wrap-up questions. Um, first one is a real big net, how do you feel about your military service looking back?

SCHOFF: I'm proud of it, very proud of it. I would do it again in a- in a nanosecond.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Uh, when Desert Storm went, I got a letter saying you're being recalled, I went down I says "You don't have to recall me, I volunteer. I'm ready to go."

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: My A-10s that I trained, they’re involved, I want to be with them. And I filled out the paperwork and got down to the question "Do you have a VA disability," I said "Yes," they said "How much?" I said "30%," they said, "Go home."

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNT: Aw.

SCHOFF: “They take you up to 29%, but to 30% we can’t take.”

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: And I said, "Well, take mine and make it 29."

HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: They wouldn't do it.

HUNT: Oh.

SCHOFF: And that- that hurt. All- all the guys that I had trained for the last four years were gonna be over there and I wasn't going to be there with them. I don’t know you just- they're family, they're my kids. They were all 18-19-20 years old when I got them.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: You know? And the fact that so many of them that were there with me at that time made careers out of the military.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Made me feel good. That I did my job, you know.
HUNT: That leads perfectly into the next question, do you have any advice for young men and women who are just entering the service?

SCHOFF: Service is different now than it was when I was in. Uh, I- I don't know how to say it but, uh, don't be a snowflake.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Own up to what you can do, you know. You- you volunteered and part of that was you’re- your oath is that you’re going to follow orders. That means you’re not gonna whine, you’re not gonna gripe- well, you're gonna gripe, everybody gripes. You wouldn't be in the military if you didn't gripe.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: But, you know, it’s time-out stuff and things like that. That's, uh, I don't see how you can run a military that way.

HUNT: Mm

SCHOFF: You gotta have discipline and, uh, the thing is- is whatever you do, as you advance, don't ever forget those around you. If you become a leader, take care of your people. That's the number one thing. Even if you have to go against- it’s hard to argue with your- your superiors but you can put it in a way that it’s not arguing, you're presenting facts. And if you can- if you take care of your people, they'll take care of you.

HUNT: Yes sir.

SCHOFF: [Laughing] I don't have another way to put it.

HUNT: Yeah, that's perfect, um, la- last question. Um, it's actually just checking if we missed anything. Would you like to share anything else about your service?

SCHOFF: I just- I am very proud that I was able to serve my country, and, uh, like I said, I didn't want to get out.

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: I- I was enjoying my job and that's the thing, is when you go into the military, find a job you like and stay with it. And that's even when you get out, that's what I see working- what I saw working in the civilian community after I got out. I went to work- I went to work for Raytheon.

HUNT: Oh.
SCHOFF: Out at PAVE PAWS but we had, uh, active duty working with us, and several of them it was obvious they were not happy with what they were doing and if you’re not happy, find something else.

HUNT: Mhm.

SCHOFF: Don't- don't just gripe about it, do some- do something else. And then I spent- I spent 22 years with Raytheon, so I uh, after PAVE PAWS closed down, I went to work on the new system that they built in South Texas down on the King Ranch. Uh, it was a uh, over-the-horizon radar for drug trafficking.

HUNT: Mhm.

HUNT: And I enjoyed that. I still lived in San Angelo, I just commuted between here and down there.

HUNT: Wow.

SCHOFF: 360 miles each way.

HUNT: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: Well, there was nowhere to live down there for my wife. I took her down there for a year and she said, "Get me out of this hole."

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

HUNTEY: Noted.

SCHOFF: Couldn’t find anything. Well, we- we had to live in a little town called Premont, we weren't in a town- in a big city or anything. One little bitty grocery store and, you know, things like that. And, uh, if you didn't speak Spanish nobody wanted to talk to you. Even the postmaster didn't want to talk to you.

HUNT: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: So, she didn't feel welcome, and I says, "Well I can understand that. They think you're different" and I said, "You're Portuguese, why not- why don't you talk to them," you know.? She says, "I tried," she says, "they don't understand Portuguese."

HUNT/HUNTLEY: [Laughter]

SCHOFF: Okay. But, you know, it- it’s- its, uh, I like it here.

HUNT: Sir. Well, thank- thank you. Thank you for your service. Great interview, um, uh, thank you, Mr. Schoff. Oh.
SCHOFF: You're Welcome.