

HHA# 00006  
Interviewee: Albert, Vernon  
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz  
Interview Date: November 7, 2002  
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA  
Interview Module& No.: MMS: SW027  
Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling has not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. There is a lot of beeping on the recording that seems to increase as the interview progresses; sometimes this interferes with audibility. The interview was saved in two tracks. I denote in the transcripts where track 1 ends and track 2 begins.]

Ethnographic preface:

Mr. Vernon Albert was born in Pennsylvania and grew up an "Army brat." He studied business at San Antonio College before joining the Army, where he went to flight school and spent two years in Vietnam. Upon leaving the military in 1967, he went to work for Petroleum Helicopters Incorporated (PHI), where he stayed until he retired in 1994. The first six years he worked for PHI, he lived in Lake Charles and worked in Cameron, but then moved to Lafayette when he took a job in the company's training department. In 1982, he became vice president and chief pilot. He currently works as an air safety investigator and consultant.

## TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [VA]

SW: This is an interview with Mister Vernon Albert. It's uh, October, sorry, November seventh, 2002, in our office. [Pause] As we told you on the phone, we're just doin' this uh, this study to determine the impact of the oil industry in this area and uh, naturally we, it's taking us into some of the auxiliary industries. I don't know if you'd term PHI an auxiliary industry or support industry.

VA: Support, yeah.

SW: Somethin' like that. And so we're uh, we're tryin' to, to flesh out the story for, for everybody basically. And our main focus is to find out um, the community impact. What the oil industry did to this area. Brought the people in and such and such. Did that kind of thing. So that's where we're kind of headed. If we could maybe start with some background info, um, where you're from and when you were born, your education. And such.

VA: Originally I was uh, born in Pennsylvania. I grew up an Army brat. [Slight pause] Germany, all over the United States. Uh, ended up goin' to college at San Antonio College in a business curriculum. Went into the Army. Went to flight school in 1963. And uh, got out of the service in '67, went straight to work for PHI. And was with them from '67 to uh, 1994.

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SW: Did you uh, see any war, um, any involvement in the war at all?

VA: Yeah, I got my, my advanced flight training in [Inaudible] Southeast Asia.

SW: Oh, okay. [Both laugh] [With their?] equipment, huh?

VA: No, I was, I was in Vietnam '64 and '65.

SW: That was the early years.

VA: I was there during the Gulf of Tonkin incident. When we just had helicopter companies and special forces troops over there, and some advisors.

SW: [As I was told?] the advisors weren't supposed to do anything, but uh-

VA: They advised. [SW laughs] The special forces guys were doin' their thing and we supported 'em. But, anyway, it was back in the days when we said if we had one good American division over here we could all clean up and go, be home by Christmas. [SW chuckles] Ten years later and well, a gazillion divisions later we came home. [Laughs]

SW: Different story at the end.

VA: Yeah. But anyway, that's, that's an unfortunate part of history.

SW: Yeah. What, what got you into flyin', what was your uh, the draw there?

VA: I wanted to fly and when the uh, being an Army brat I stayed up pretty close with what was goin' on through the military newspapers. And uh, when they opened up flight school for enlistees, where you go in right off the street into flight school, that's what I was waiting to happen because I didn't want to go in and spend a couple years as a grunt somewhere and then apply for it and maybe not make it. So when it opened up to civilians enlisting could go straight to flight school if you passed all the tests and everything, you had the commitment before you enlisted. So.

SW: Wow. You couldn't do that nowadays, right, they-

VA: Yeah, they do that.

SW: They still do it that way? Oh, okay.

VA: They can. I mean, you can do it either way. So anyway, that's, that's what got me into the service was direct flight school.

SW: And your dad, your dad was the Army so you were always kind of around that atmosphere [and everything?]. Um. [Pause] Coming, I guess we'll fast forward to '67 when you got into PHI. How did, how did that happen? How'd you end up livin' here in Lafayette?

VA: Um, that's where the job was. I uh, sent out resumes and job applications and PHI responded favorably. My wife is from Deridder. So being in sunny south Louisiana was not a hardship. And uh, throughout my career with PHI as I worked up through the ranks, uh, you know, one of the biggest expenses that these support companies have, especially the helicopter companies, is training. Because a lot of people do not want to live along the Gulf Coast. And uh, so the turnover's high for that reason. Not because it's not a good job, people just don't want to live down here. They don't want to work seven and seven, they don't want the

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family separation. But uh, you know, it fit in fine with me. I did that for about, well, from '67 to '72. And then I started promoting up through the company and got to the regular five day work week or should I say a regular seven day work week. But uh-

SW: So you guys were working just like the offshore guys were working seven and seven?

VA: Yeah. Yeah the, the guys that fly on the line and the mechanics, uh, they're out in the field for seven and seven or a 14 and 14. But it's a one for one schedule.

SW: Yeah, it's one, it's, it's-

VA: A day on, a day off for everyday you work basically. Seven and seven, 14 and 14. Even numbers.

SW: Matches up for 20 days in a month and then it goes on from there. And I've, I've talked to quite a few people, offshore guys, and they uh, I guess it's uh-

VA: Well some of the companies work 14 and seven. I think some of the boat companies work 14 and seven. And, yeah, so you have different schedules. But uh, helicopter industry's basically seven and seven.

SW: Basically the same and the mechanics the same way. So they uh, they responded to you that was here out the office in Lafayette, the one they had here? And you just came from wherever you were-

VA: I came from the Army. We lived in Lake Charles for six years.

SW: Oh, so you-

VA: And then I had an opportunity to go into the training department at PHI, but to do that I had to move over here. So.

SW: But you already, I mean, they must've, the reason they responded to you, you knew how to fly already.

VA: Oh yeah.

SW: There was, there was your, you're direct in the Army gave you that. So, then you came, they were hirin' a lot of guys uh, from the Army?

VA: Oh yeah. In fact most, uh, the, the ratios are changing a little bit now, because the military's not training as many people, but they uh, at one time about 85 percent of the pilots flying in the Gulf were all ex-military. And, you know, one of the reasons for that is it's so expensive to get civilian flight training that uh, you know, guys are go-, in fact we had young guys that worked for us as helpers right out of high school. Went in the Army, went through flight school, and came back, and hired on as pilots. And those were generally our most stable employees, because those were the guys that were from around here.

SW: Yeah. Locals. Basically, I guess. Where are the mechanics from that are-

VA: All over. Oh yeah.

SW: [Inaudible]. They were already trained as well, a lot of those guys?

VA: No, a lot of the mechanics came up through uh, civilian route uh, because it's uh, almost all the big technical schools in the different states have aviation uh, maintenance courses. So, I mean, you could do that just like goin' to a technical school and becoming a diesel mechanic.

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SW: Go work for Boeing or something.

VA: And uh, then they uh, go into the industry where they have the technical schools. It's a minimum of 18 month course. So. So a lot of the mechanics are, are civilian-trained. There's, there's a fair percentage that uh, get their training in the military, but the difference between pilots and mechanic, because pilot can go through military flight school and fly in the service, and just by taking a written test get his civilian licenses. A mechanic can't do that. A mechanic, even if he's a mechanic in the military has to go out and take a certain amount of schooling and practical tests and everything. The time they spend as mechanics in the military counts toward the experience they need, but that's about the only advantage they have. They still have to take all the written and practical tests.

SW: So sounds like they had to do somethin' more again, whereas you, as a pilot, you're comin' out-

VA: As pilots all we had to do is take a test on civilian regulations. We didn't have to take any flying or anything else.

SW: You ma-

VA: We took one 50 question test on civilian regulations and they handed us a commercial license.

SW: You were pretty much ready for it anyways with all your flight time and everything. But uh, that's interesting because uh, plus because a lot of the pilots were military, were coming from all over to begin with. We talk to a lot of offshore people who are uh, or other land people who come from Texas or Oklahoma. Oilfields there and move here. But you guys were just coming from everywhere it seems like.

VA: Oh yeah.

SW: That's interesting-

VA: In fact we did recruiting uh, at the major facilities where there were a lot of helicopter pilots. Like where you had the air mobile divisions they had out in Fort Hood or Fort Bragg. Plus, like we'd actually go there and have recruiting seminars on weekends.

SW: To get some pilots, guys who are finishing up [Inaudible].

VA: Especially it the late '70s, early '80s when the growth was so fast here on the gulf coast that uh, we had a hard time keepin' up personnel.

SW: So, but you said not, not too many people wanted to live here in uh, in the gulf coast area, where else could they go for PHI?

VA: All over the world.

SW: They had some California-

VA: We had uh, we had jobs all over the place: Saudi Arabia, Central and South America, the Middle East, the Far East, virtually everywhere. We had about... well at the height of our business we had close to 90 aircraft internationally. Well 90 aircrafts, a minimum of 180 pilots and about the same number of mechanics. So there was a lot of opportunity to get away from the, you know, get internationally.

SW: So you have, basically, if you have one, one aircraft and you have two pilots, four like you're sayin', because one guys-

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VA: If it's one of the smaller aircraft. If it was one of the larger aircraft you had four pilots.

SW: Oh okay. You always, so they, 'cause they rotate 'em out.

VA: Well no, you have two in the aircraft at the same time.

SW: Oh okay.

VA: The smaller aircraft you fly single pilot, the larger aircraft you fly with two pilots.

SW: Small means you carry a pilot and three people? Is about it?

VA: Um, up to six.

SW: Up to six. How 'bout the larger ones?

VA: Well, the regulations are that any, any aircraft that you fly for hire that has 10 or more passengers has to have two pilots.

SW: Oh okay.

VA: So nine or less is si-, you can fly single pilot. Ten or more you have to two pilots.

SW: [Inaudible] what kind of uh, aircraft [was uh?] [Pause]

VA: Virtually any commercially acceptable helicopter. The companies would fly what the customers wanted. Even if it means going out and buying 'em. So, you know, Eurocopter, [Scacorsky Bell?], McDonald-Douglas, the whole variety. If they made a commercially acceptable aircraft, it'll find it's way into the Gulf somewhere.

SW: Now you guys uh, how did it work as far as contracting out to the oil companies for you to actually fly their employees out? What did you, did you guys have a specific contract with someone or did you just, or you fly for anybody basically?

VA: Oh. Basically the, the client comes to the operator and, you know, requests the service. I mean, just like you pick up the phone and call a, a charter vehicle, they pick up the phone and call a charter aircraft. Now most of the aircraft are on pretty long-term contracts with the companies. They do that for a number of reasons, not the least of which is get a better price. But uh, so that they know they have the assets they need. Because if you wait to call every morning, somebody else may have called late yesterday afternoon. So the larger majority of the aircraft flyin' on the Gulf coast are on a full-time contract. Now you do have some companies, like Taylor Energy and Chevron, that own and operate their own aircraft. They don't use operators. They, they use operators for the overflow, but primarily they own and operate their own aircraft.

SW: Chevron and uh-

VA: Taylor Energy and Chevron, I think, are the only two now that are doing it, there were more in the past. Mobil used to do it, uh, Exxon has a unique blend. They own the aircraft and the heliports and everything, but they hire an operator to fly and maintain the aircraft.

SW: So they-

VA: So it just depends on how they're bean counters figure what works out best for them.

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SW: Doesn't it always come, it always goes back to those guys, doesn't it?

VA: Generally.

SW: Nowadays, yeah. [Chuckles] More so now than it used to be.

VA: Generally.

SW: Um-

VA: Oh there's been a lot of change in the Gulf as far as how the aircraft are used. You know, the '60s and '70s, every field offshore had its own helicopter, the field foreman came and went as he wished, and everything. As the equipment got more expensive and the price of oil came down, uh, they got to where they use the aircraft much more efficiently. No more Sunday newspaper runs.

SW: No. [VA laughs]

VA: And stuff like that. So it was uh, it was a little bit loose in the '60 and '70s. And then, you know, it peaked out in the '80s just before the big slow down. Uh, for example, at PHI going into that we had four hundred and... between 425, 430 helicopters, and [SW whistles] thirty-three hundred employees, almost a thousand pilots. And now they're, well I don't know their actual size now, but it's just over half that.

SW: Yeah, they just, they built that big facility out there uh. [Chuckles] What uh, what are the '80s, what did the bust do to PHI? How did that affect them?

VA: Made 'em a lot smaller, real fast.

SW: Cut a lot of people?

VA: Oh yeah. You know, when I took over as vice president and chief pilot in '82, we had 987 pilots and 427 aircrafts. When I left, when I retired in '94, we had uh, 560 pilots and two hundred six-five, seventy aircraft.

SW: Cut it in half almost.

VA: Pretty close. [Pause] Probably 60, 65 percent of where we were.

SW: Where'd all those guys go? They left town?

VA: [Sighs] They, most of 'em left the area. Found employment at other places. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, we had a pretty, all of the companies for basically the same reasons, not the least of which was salary, salaries were pretty low back then. And uh, so there was a high turnover. So a lot of the reduction in size was handled through attrition. Granted there were some layoffs, but a lot more of the reductions took place through normal attrition than, that through out and out layoffs. [Slight pause]

SW: [Clears throat] So the, I guess I had a misconception, I was always, I always thought that pilots were paid well. You're saying the salaries were kind of low?

VA: Well, depends on which pilots you're talkin' about. If you're talkin' about airline pilots, they're so grossly overpaid it's criminal. [SW chuckles] Uh, the guys here on the Gulf coast were starting in the mid-20s and could work up to the 50s.

SW: That was in uh, what, what year range?

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VA: That was in, that was in the mid to late '80s. Now they're starting in the low-40s and going up to the 80s, so.

SW: [Inaudible]

VA: It's a big difference, yeah.

SW: But what about the in '60s and the '70s? [Pause]

VA: When I got out of the service my salary tripled. [Both laugh] So, but that's the good news. Before you put all the economic factors into it, I make more a day now than I made a month then. So uh, anyway, it's, you know, you ha-, you have to apply the, the time scale to it. You know, to have what I had at 725 dollars a month in 1967, I'd probably have to make 60,000 a month, I mean, 60,000 a year now.

SW: Yeah, just-

VA: Five thousand a month.

SW: Inflation basically.

VA: Yeah. Because, you know, I rented a very nice apartment for 160 dollars a month. That same apartment today over in Lake Charles is goin' for a little over 700 dollars a month. The very same apartment. And that building's been paid for many times over since 1967.

SW: Yeah. I often think I'm in the wrong business when I hear stuff like that. [Laughs]

VA: Well I mean, you know, it, it's uh, the apartment complex when I moved into it in '67 was less than a year old. And we had a nice two-bedroom apartment and paid 160 dollars a month, and we thought that was terrible. But it was a nice place to live and a pool and it's landscaped. Now people living in that same apartment are paying four and a half, five times that. And they're living in a 35-year old house. [Laughs]

SW: That's strange sounding, isn't it, the way it works like that. Huh. When you, when you guys moved to Laf-, what, okay, that was 1967-

VA: I moved to Lafayette in sixty-, in '73.

SW: Oh-

VA: Seventy-two, '72.

SW: You worked PHI out of Lake Charles?

VA: Actually out of Cameron.

SW: Out of Cameron.

VA: I lived in Lake Charles, but I was workin'. With a tour in Alaska. Yeah, we moved around quite a bit, within the company. I didn't move the household. But I'd go to work at Morgan City or Cameron or wherever, where my we-, to work came up.

SW: Right, so your seven and then you came back. And that was the other question I was gonna ask you, did you get bumped around a lot? And so, sounds like you did-



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VA: You can [Sighs] in certain periods I was, other times I had a job where I went to the same back, well, in fact uh, four of the six years I was in and out of Cameron, I was workin' for the same client. And I went to work at the same place everyday. The only time I left Cameron is if I wanted to work over on time off or somethin' like that. Then go to other places. But uh, primarily you get into a groove where you go back to the same base most of the time. Now there's a certain percentage of these pilots, like the guys that fly the larger aircraft that do crew changes, they move around a lot, 'cause they'll do a crew change out of Intercoastal one day and in Morgan City the next day and out of Galveston the next day. So uh, that's what we refer to as the "[gool?]" pilots. [They were in the pilot pool?] from day to day. They may always go to work at Morgan City. But during the week, they could end up at five different bases. Just livin' out of a overnight bag.

SW: It's kind of rough.

VA: And that's one of the things that added to the turnover. People just don't like to be vagabonds.

SW: There you go, isn't uh, I guess those were the bottom echelon, too, so they were given worse hours?

VA: Well, yeah, the more junior guys.

SW: Yeah. Lower salary-

VA: 'Cause as you gain seniority, you got the more stable jobs.

SW: So what contributed to that was a first of all, [Chuckling] maybe some of them didn't want to live in the Gulf region like you said. Low salary and getting the, the bad-

VA: I'll tell you, I can tell you people from outside Louisiana do not want to live in Louisiana. [Pause] It's, I don't care who you talk to, you'll find that out. And very few like me who will move here and stay here. It's home for me now, but-

SW: Yeah, you got a connection, you wife.

VA: But I grew up all, yeah, I grew up all over the place. And uh, you know, I retired and stayed here, so I must like it. But uh-

SW: The foods pretty good.

VA: You know-

SW: Foods okay, a little bit [Chuckles]

VA: But, you know, you take uh, you take a young family that doesn't stay here long enough to get to know the area, then they're-

SW: Yeah-

VA: They're very seldom, I don't know if you've moved much in your life?

SW: Um, yeah, I-

VA: But very seldom do you move and just love the place you move to. You think more about the place you left. Like when we moved from Lake Charles over here we thought, "Oh man, this is terrible." That was in



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'73. And now we stick our nose in the air when we go through Lake Charles. Don't know how we could've liked it so much, but it's just, you know, personal [wounds/wants?].

SW: Yeah, I think so, I think so too. Uh. [Pause] What about job security? Uh-

VA: For the people that wanted to stay, it was really good. Until-

SW: The bust.

VA: The bust in, in the '80s. And it's been, you know, it's pretty stable, because the people in the support industries are finally recognizing the cyclical nature of what goes on in the Gulf. And, you know, in reality the price of oil, the price of a barrel of oil has nothin' to do with what the job security is today. It was to do with next year's budget. And I think it took probably 15 or 20 years for the support companies, the oilfield uh, support companies, there's boat operators, the rental tool and the pipe companies, and all that, to realize that [Sighing] if they watch the TV tonight and oil dropped five dollars a barrel, it's not gonna crash tomorrow, it's gonna crash next year when next year's budget comes out. And the money that's being spent out there this year is what they made last year. So if last year was a good year as far as oil prices and that, that's how, that's how it's gonna function. Now the gas pump prices are, as far as I'm concerned they're more emotional than real. I mean a barrel, barrel, the price of a barrel of oil goes up so the gas prices go up. And uh, so I don't, I don't think there's an economic reason for that other than they think they can do it and they do.

SW: It's some bean counters.

VA: Yeah.

SW: Once again.

VA: But when you look at the drilling programs, now, that stuff is, you know, that's in next year's budget. So even though, even though you're having a good year this year, if last year was bad, you're not gonna have a whole lot going on this year because of the way it was budgeted. Next year'll be good and, and the downturn might be bad, so you're kind of chasing a wave. And I think when the, the companies realized that, they started to realize that, they started sizing their companies for that.

SW: They preparing-

VA: And they didn't panic, they didn't panic the year they go out and hire 75 employees because uh, you can go by Morgan City, Intercoastal, any of those places, and one day everybody has parking lots that are too small and the next day everybody's got parking lots that are too big. So as the management of these companies and the ownership of the companies got wiser, they realized that they're gonna have to size for their benefit and not chase that cycle all the time.

SW: And-

VA: And, and I think you're seeing that now with the success of some of these smaller companies.

SW: They're able to stabilize their staff more. I've heard from some of the, several of these guys that work in the oil patch on the rigs that they didn't hire a bunch of people. Everybody out there busted their butt and when there was a downturn, then they got a break, but the company didn't-

VA: They got a break. That's right. They got a break, but they had a job.

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SW: P-, was PHI sort of like that back in the day too or?

VA: Well, to a point. You know, when I was there figuring workforce, we, we never panicked until we got to where we were about 20 percent short of people. And, and the reason for that is if you're a little short. Oh, I won't say, disregard that. Not 20 percent short, but 20 pilots per schedule short. And the reason for that is you always have people that want overtime. They want to work more, they want to make the money. And if you're just a little bit short of staff, at least people have that opportunity. And uh, and the company comes out ahead because-

SW: They don't have to hire and train.

VA: You don't have to hire and train, plus it's cheaper to pay one employee more than it is to pay two employees and have the overhead of all the social benefits and everything.

SW: Okay. So they, they-

VA: So, so every company has to decide where that line is. And that, that line is not to be 100 percent all the time. You know, I think the guy that goes out and hires, if he needs 100 pep-, 100 people and he figures he's gonna have a few on vacation all the time, so he decides to hire 120 [Slight pause] he's lookin' for trouble economically down the road.

SW: Yeah, should be an 80. [Chuckles]

VA: Well, actually, he should be at 100, because [Pause] give the staff that wants the extra money, that wants to work over the opportunity to do it on these other people's vacation and sick schedules. You know, if you, if you gauge yourself in size to where you'll never have to have overtime, there's a percentage of the year you're gonna have people sittin' around with nothing to do. And that's a lot more expensive when you're paying salary, social benefits, and everything to employees that you can't fully utilize, than it is to have people with, give the opportunity to make some overtime. Certain groups of people don't want to make overtime, they want their time off.

SW: But there's other-

VA: Other, other people, other people want, in fact, some even depend on it. So.

SW: Helps out the company and the employee who wants that, that extra-

VA: Yeah. And think over the last 15 or 20 years these smaller support companies have real-, have come to that realization that number one, the business is going to be cyclical, so plan on it. And size your company for how big you want to be. Don't chase the industry you're supporting all the time. Because all you're gonna do is spend a lot of money in training and have a lot of layoffs and a lot of times when you're panic and hire people. So decide how big you want to be and stick to it.

SW: Yeah. It's a good way-

VA: Make, make a lot of money d-, when times are good make enough money when times are bad.

SW: Yeah. That's, that's a good way of saying it. [Pause] What um, I know flying helicopters is not the, not the safest mode of travel, although that could be a misnomer.

VA: My family worried more about me driving to and from work than they did while I was flying.

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SW: That's what I hear-

VA: If you look, if you look at uh, if you look at the helicopter industry and the amount of flying that goes on just, let's just take the Gulf here. [Slight pause] The Gulf, there's probably... the Gulf probably flies... close to between 500 and 600,000 flight hours a year with all the aircraft down here. The small aircraft will average four or five takeoffs per hour. [Pause] The larger aircraft is a little less than that because they make longer flights. But uh, and you multiply all that out and come up with a number of about three to four million departures a year. And you can almost count the accidents on one hand and that's, that's a phenomenally good safety record. In fact it compares to the commuter airline industry very favorably. So are their accidents? Of course there's accidents. When you have humans and machines workin' together you strive to have as few accidents as you can, but anyone that says you gonna work where you have no accidents is a fool. And I don't want to have as my safety director. I want the guy that says we're gonna reduce it to as low as we can possibly, but we're [never?] gonna redu-, remove risks, but don't give me a guy that says he's gonna make it zero. He can make it zero for awhile [Pause] but it's gonna-

SW: Odds always catch up to you.

VA: Yeah. And uh, so anyway, the [Slight pause] you know, one of the biggest misconceptions is people think if the engine quits on a helicopter it just falls. And that's not true. The difference between an airplane and a helicopter is, if the engine quits on an airplane, you're gonna hit the ground with forward momentum. You, there's no other option if let it, if you let it get too slow, it's gonna stall and spin in. So you have to keep an airspeed in an airplane so when you touch the ground you have forward momentum. In a helicopter you're doin' [Inaudible] auto rotation and you can stop it when it gets to the ground, so you don't have the forward momentum. So your chances of surviving an engine failure in a helicopter is significantly better than surviving an engine failure in an airplane.

SW: Even if you're, if you're really high up you can set-

VA: It doesn't matter how high you are.

SW: You can get-

VA: The higher you are the better off. Because the more choice of landing areas you have. But uh, that's, Hollywood has not done the helicopter industry any good. You know, everybody, every time a helicopter flies across the ridge line or over the horizon in, in the movie theater blows up. And uh, it's not, not nearly the case.

SW: So what, what does the auto rotation do? [Pause]

VA: Well. What you do in auto rotation is the aircraft starts to decent and the rush of air up from the bottom keeps the blades turning. Just like if you have a fan sittin' in your window-

SW: Yeah, even if the engine's dead-

VA: And there's a breeze blowin' the fan turns. Same principle. Now there's some things the pilot has to do to allow that to happen, but as long as you have rotor RPM you can fly the helicopter. So you just keep the rotor RPM in the green during the auto rotation. Now you won't glide as far as an airplane will, but you're gonna have a much happier arrival.

SW: Okay. So a good pilot can, can bring it down and, and not have-

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VA: And these guys all train for that [Inaudible]. It's uh, so safety, safety's not really, obviously it's a concern, but it's not, I don't go out and say flying helicopters is unsafe. [Slight pause] My job now is I'm an air safety investigator so. [Chuckles]

SW: I got a, I read a book it was about a Vietnam pilot called "Chicken Walk." I don't know if you're familiar with it. Now I've seen that term auto rotation in there. They, they kind of explained it, but you just did a much better job. I, I'm much more clear on it.

VA: It's, it's a very simple maneuver, you learn it from day one when you're flyin' helicopters. And [Inaudible], it's the most stable state you can put a helicopter. So if all else turns to trash, go into auto rotation, it will never get better than that. [SW chuckles]

SW: Did you ever have to do that?

VA: Yeah, oh I've done thousands of them in training. I've never had an actual.

SW: So you've never had a crash or anything? [Pause] It's, I've uh, talked to some oil guy he said he got of the p-, back in the day, in the beginning it was relaxed safety standards and-

VA: Well, they didn't have regulations.

SW: Yeah, that's what it was. And he said uh, that they left the rope that anchored it to the platform tied and it crashed-

VA: That still happens today.

SW: The company sent out another pilot and said, "Get on and fly 'em there." They weren't hurt, they had to come back out. Nowadays there'd be reports and uh, ship 'em off to the hospital.

VA: Well there were then, too, it's just back then it was a half page report, now it's a 25 and a half page report.

SW: For a crash.

VA: Yeah.

SW: Plane goes over the si-, I mean, helicopter goes over the side, nobody hurt, send 'em out.

VA: E-, this is a big economic effect of the industry, but it's not a, an effect as far safety, but you'd be surprised how many aircraft a year get blown off of platforms and lost.

SW: Out there in the Gulf you mean?

VA: Yeah. You get these freak winds with the summer su-, summer thunderstorms and stuff like that. Or even if they're tied down, I, I've seen aircraft leave the deck and with tie-down ropes and the tie-down eyes are still on the deck, that aircraft's gone. So that, that's an economic, it's not classified as an aviation accident because there was no intent to fly, the aircraft was tied down on the deck. So it's a, it's a loss of equipment.

SW: But not li-

VA: But it's not an accident. And that, that probably happens four or five times a year.

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SW: Out there on the platforms. And they're getting deeper out there, too, so the winds don't have anything to stop, there's no-

VA: Well, once you get about 15 miles out it's-

SW: The same.

VA: Fifteen, 500, [Chuckling] it doesn't make much difference. [SW chuckles]

SW: How's it like flying out there seeing all that water?

VA: Oh it's beautiful, especially in the summertime. Gorgeous. You don't have any power lines, you don't have any mountains, you don't have any of that stuff to worry about.

SW: You just flying.

VA: Just a nice, and it's stable, you don't have, you have turbulence, but you don't have near the turbulence you have onshore. Because you don't have the thermal activity in the summertime that you have onshore.

SW: You still fly at all or?

VA: Yeah. Every chance I get.

SW: It's in the blood, isn't it? [Chuckles]

VA: Yeah. I just don't get it, I don't get enough chances.

SW: So, let's shift over to some, some industry questions. We'll stick with Lafayette in particular. Based on the history of PHI, how, how and why did they end up here in Lafayette at that big facility they have out there and?

VA: In 1949 when it started, Frank Lee's brother Jack was a geologist for Kerr-McGee. And they were doing the seismic work in the marshes south of here, down south and west of Franklin, in that area. And [Pause] the marsh buggies were just not doing things as quick as they would have liked to do it and doing the surveying and everything was extremely difficult. And he got the idea, Jack Lee, to try helicopters. And that was when Bell was still in Buffalo, New York, rather than Fort Worth, Texas. And uh, they, he got three helicopters, right down here where they bought it. And uh, this guy that died just recently named Herb Gustafson, who had nothing to do with PHI, but he was the salesman for those three aircraft. And uh, anyway, they brought 'em down and started workin' with 'em, found out they worked fine. And uh, you know, met all their expectations. But Jack was the kind of guy that was kind of a, an entrepreneurial spirit. He liked to start things, but he didn't necessarily like to run 'em. And after a couple of years he sold the company to Bob Suggs and Dickey Bayon. They lived in New Orleans, but the aircraft were in this area. So from that day until about a year, little over a year ago, the corporate headquarters for PHI was in New Orleans. But the operational headquarters has always been here. And, primarily because of where it's [located?]. Just-

SW: This is a good location?

VA: Well, it is a good central location if you look at the Gulf coast. I mean, if you look at how the oil industry grew it started at Morgan City and then started flaring out from there in both directions. And uh, you know, Lafayette was well-placed for it. With an airport, with railroad, with highways. I mean, if you look at Lafayette on a map you have major highways that cross here. 'Course railroad's not as big a factor anymore as it was

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in the '40s and '50s. But uh, and then you have the regional airport. So, you know, it was just a, a good place for it to go.

SW: How-

[END TRACK 1; START TRACK 2]

VA: -a good place for it to go.

SW: How old is that airport in New Iberia? Is that-

VA: Oh, it was built in the '40s I think. It was, it was a Naval training base.

SW: Why didn't they, they ever think about New Iberia, because it was closer to the-

VA: It was a Naval training base.

SW: So it wasn't-

VA: It wasn't available.

SW: And Lafayette was, so that's another one of the reasons. 'Cause you often, you often wonder why you do see a lot of certain type of oil companies in New Iberia, but you see a lot of the-

VA: If it would all start today, it would probably be down there. [Air Log?] started in '72, they're down there. And uh, [Inaudible]. But, you know, you go back to the '40s, the late '40s and I think the Navy was still down there in late '40s.

SW: Plus the, this was still more centrally, like you said, the highways and all that other stuff, so-

VA: Well-

SW: That [lended it to?]-

VA: Right.

SW: [Inaudible].

VA: Lake Charles and Lafayette are two examples of absolutely grotesque [finding?] in aviation as far I'm concerned. You have Chennault Air Force Base at Lake Charles; you got 11,000 foot concrete runway; the Air Force is movin' out, the city builds a new airport downtown. Now, explain to me why that's not a waste of money?

SW: And space.

VA: Here in Lafayette one of the main [Inaudible] uh, New Iberia, got a 12,000 foot runway down there, they'll handle any kind of airplane flyin' today. 'Fact they're, they're paintin' 747s down there. And to put all the money in a, in the airport here to me makes no sense. When you, when you have a really ideal facility that's already built and running. Here they were, they were runnin' the commercial service out of here early on, so there's a little bit of a reason why they stay here. In Lake Charles they were actually running their commercial service off of the air force base. And they had a terminal on, on the east side of the runway. And I'll never understand why they built another airport. But uh, they did.

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SW: Poor planning. [Chuckles]

VA: It was poor planning or the wrong people owned the property or something.

SW: Probably had a lot to do with it. [Chuckles] Uh. [Pause]

VA: It's amazing how much aviation [fund?] money nonaviation can waste. [SW chuckles]

SW: That's a good way of puttin' it. In what ways do you feel that PHI as a company locating here and growing, how did it affect the community of Lafayette?

VA: Oh. I think if you go back a few years you'll find out that probably other than the city, PHI was the largest employer in this area for a long time. When we had thirty-three hundred employees or thirty-two hundred, it was between thirty-two and thirty-three hundred employees, about 65 percent of those employees work out of Lafayette area. That's a big payroll. A lot of the field employees lived in the Lafayette area. So even though they were workin' in Morgan City or Venice or Cameron, they're economic impact was here. This is where their families were, this is where their kids went to school, this is where they bought their groceries. You know, dad went to work down on the coast, but the pay check was here.

SW: Yeah, we got a craft that flew down there-

VA: Or, or he drove down there and he lived there during the week, and he came back. So you know, you have a company that size, and even today the size, if you put the helicopter industry together, you [Inaudible] Industrial over here in Scott, you got PHI, you got Air Log, you got uh, uh, Rotor Craft uh, Leasing in, in uh, Broussard. There's still a lot of money coming into [this area?] through helicopter operators.

SW: What kind of uh, you mention all these other companies, what kind of support industries uh, assist PHI? Do they, do they b-, they spawn anything that [Inaudible]?

VA: Oh yeah. They buy they're fuel, they used to buy it through [Mackarel?].

SW: Okay.

VA: Uh, you know, they've got to buy fuel. Most of the aviation, the aircraft parts come through the manufacturers which be somewhere else. But, you know, they buy their vehicles, they buy their car gas, they buy their paint, they buy their soap, the cafeteria at the hanger, you know, all of these things, all of that adds to the local economy. You know, you buy 60 trucks at your, and things like that. That's all local.

SW: So it just circulates, I guess. Plus they were, they were [Inaudible], I mean, as, as the oil industry's growing, PHI's growing to fill those needs. And so-

VA: Well, yeah, but as the oil industry draws out, they're still stayin' here and makin' bigger contributions because the stuff they're buyin's more expensive.

SW: So it keeps it [around?].

VA: So, yeah, the support industry isn't gonna move to Houston. It's not gonna go to New Orleans. It's gonna move to where it's easiest to get [Inaudible?]. Intercoastal Citys, the Morgan Citys, the Camerons, the Fourchons.

SW: [It's all here?]. And it's got that ace-



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VA: That's where Highway 90 and I-10 come together at I-49.

SW: They've got that ace in their pocket. Keep it that way. Um. [Pause] Did you, did you ever notice or pick up on any negative effects or recurring problems that uh, not necessarily what PHI did, but the industry, you know, as it materialized um, it was bad, that raise another question.

VA: Right I [Pause] I think what we've already talked about as far as turnover [Phone ringing] and people not liking to live here and everything is the negative effect. But uh, you know, as far as business-wise, I don't, I don't really think there was a predominant negative effect.

SW: Other than maybe in the beginning people took too much stock into certain, into the supporting the industry and then the bottom dropped out, that kind of lost it.

VA: A lot of people learned very valuable lessons the hard way.

SW: My father had to eventually sell his uh, his warehouse 'cause of that. And he's saying a lot of the things that I've heard you say, were able to learn their lesson.

VA: Well the good, the well-managed companies have learned their lesson. You're still gonna have, you're still gonna have the guys that are going to gear-up thinking, ah, it's getting better, it'll be this way the rest of their life. They're either gonna learn or they're gonna go broke.

SW: Yeah, one way or another-

VA: Yeah, the old salts are gonna sit there and keep goin' to the bank every, every, first of every month.

SW: Something has to give. [Chuckles]

VA: Yeah.

SW: So you got here in '72, what did Lafayette look like at that time? [Pause]

VA: Exactly like it does today only smaller. [Both laugh]

SW: So it's [shrunk for a long time?].

VA: No, it was smaller then.

SW: Oh, okay.

VA: They uh, oh, it's just hard to, it's hard to mention all the changes. I live on the south side of town.

SW: [Inaudible]-

VA: I built my house in 1975, I was in the country.

SW: Where-

VA: [Inaudible].

SW: Where is that on?

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VA: On [Steiner?] Road, off of, right there by Plantation Elementary.

SW: And you-

VA: Right next to River Ranch.

SW: You're almost downtown now. [Chuckles]

VA: And uh, you know, we were in-, incorporated into the city in uh, you know, I, I remember when Ambassador Caffery used to be New Flanders Road and it was two lanes and with ditches on each side, don't dare get off the road.

SW: How long-

VA: And after the woods. And now, I mean, just look at the, the phenomenal growth that's taken place, especially on that side of town. And, and let's face it, the oil industry built Ambassador Caffery. All those big office buildings over there, from the river west, were all oil company. Mansions that were built there, the big office complexes, you know, [Teneco?] built one. At one time driving back by those office buildings looking at signs in front it was like the oil companies united nation. [SW chuckles] Now they're either empty or [Pause] [Inaudible] insurance company got three or four offices [Inaudible].

SW: Bunch of different companies were in one [Inaudible].

VA: Yeah. But you, but, you know, so the influence that the oil industry's had in this town is... like, someone that moved into town today wouldn't realize it [Inaudible] history of uh, how it [grew?] [Inaudible]. But that, that's been the big, the big growth that I've seen.

SW: It brought people in from everywhere.

VA: Oh yeah.

SW: Like you said earlier, it brings that [fresh?] helicopter pilot and his family [Inaudible]. Sometimes-

VA: Pilots not nearly as much as the mechanics or [Inaudible].

SW: [Another more?]-

VA: A lot of the pilots being ex-military or retired military stay in the Pensacola area or wherever where they have the, the military, still have the military privileges. They're able to shop in the PXs and the commissaries and the medical stuff. So the retired military guys will generally live someplace close to an existing military facility. Which means they're gonna drive from Pensacola to Morgan City every Thursday [afternoon?]. Or every other Thursday afternoon, they're home on Friday morning. But uh, workin' a seven and seven schedule, I mean we had guys that lived in Colorado.

SW: [Inaudible]-

VA: Flew, they flew their own airplanes down here. [Slight pause]

SW: Hm. That's very interesting. That was the pilots, so you said the mechanics and kind of stayed here and the other people, the office people-

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VA: Well, you know, when you get into the support people, you get away from the technical staff, that's all local employees. I mean, you know-

SW: They hired-

VA: They're still-

SW: [local anyway?].

VA: Yeah, they're still uh, they're still livin' next door to their grandma.

SW: But that's the company [Inaudible] by giving a local a job.

VA: Oh, exactly right. Well one of the, one of the things that, that happened that PHI was instrumental in helping this to happen, but uh, you know, the aviation trade school out at the airport. I, I, it was, it's amazing to me the largest gathering of helicopters in the United States other than the big military bases are right here on the Gulf coast, headquartered in Lafayette. You have PHI and Air Log both here. A kid can't grow up here and go through flight school in Lafayette to learn how to fly helicopters. Until I think it was about '91 or '92, a kid couldn't get A and P license in Lafayette to be a aviation mechanic. [Pause]

SW: That's kind of strange.

VA: And, you know, economically to me that's, that's... the education system even though it would have to be privately funded. I'm not sayin' it's a school board's problem or anything like that. But for someone not to jump on that is a amazing to me that that it hasn't happened. Because, I mean, the things you look for, for, to establish a flight school is you wanna find someplace that has a reasonable cost of living, good weather, or predominantly good weather, and uh, places where you get housing, things like that for students. And it's all right here. But no one's takin' the step to. And, you know, you got people runnin' all over the world tryin' to drum up business and I would think that it, it would be lucrative for 'em to quit buyin' airline tickets and try to develop business some of their own entrepreneurs here in town to establish some of these things. That uh, would be much less expensive and much easier to establish than goin' to Taiwan and gettin' somebody who's... you know, it seems like, and that's not just a Lafayette problem, that's a Dallas problem, that's a San Francisco problem. But we have so many people trying to go other places to get things and bring it in, why not take the resources and take advantage of what you have? [Slight pause]

SW: Do you see it happening? [Pause]

VA: I, I'd do it if I had the finances, but.

SW: [Chuckles] Everyone, as long as it-

VA: The people, the people that [Chuckling] the people that have the financing don't do it. 'Course maybe they're smart and maybe that's why they have it. [Laughs]

SW: Maybe that's the reason they have [the most?].

VA: But, you know, you, I'm totally ingrained in the aviation industry so I can see it from that side. You know, you talk to another guy that's totally ingrained in the grocery business and he'd see it, have a totally different view of it.

SW: Talk to the bean counters and they say it's not feasible. [Chuckles]

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VA: But uh, well, no. Lafayette for example, for years [Slight pause] PHI wanted to have representative on the airport commission. They wouldn't allow because we were [temp?]. [Pause] But a housewife can get on the airport commission.

SW: 'Cause she lives here. She's a resident-

VA: A funeral director can get on the airport commission.

SW: It's amazing.

VA: A, a professional politician can get on the airport commission. People that know nothing about aviation and running airports. And then they wonder why they have some of the problems out at the airport that they have.

SW: Has that changed or it's still-

VA: No.

SW: So there's, there's still no PHI member on the commission?

VA: Look, get a list, no, there's, there are no professional aviation organizations that live on the airport that are represented on, on the board.

SW: Hm. [Pause]

VA: Sometime you have a chance, I don't, I don't have a [list?], haven't seen one in the last year or two, get a list of who belong, who is one the airport commission and look at what their backgrounds are.

SW: I'll go look it up. I can get that at the library right there. That's interesting. [Pause] Hm. That doesn't make much sense. [Chuckles]

VA: Guarantee it's the truth. There is people on there that have pilot's licenses and that's as close as they come to.

SW: [You know?] how the industry works.

VA: Yeah. I don't know of anyone on there that's ever been a part of the aviation industry as far as [makin'?] things happen. And then you have people that don't understand the industry goin' and negotiating with the airlines for service.

SW: Yeah. And that's where the problems come out. [Pause] That's interesting. Wouldn't've known that unless I talked first with you.

VA: The uh, you know, one of the FBOs out here at uh, the Lafayette Airport has the, the contract to sell military fuel here. But the one, one of the FBOs down in New Iberia also has it. And New Iberia out sells Lafayette on aviation fuel to the military probably 100 gallons to one. [Pause] Now why would someone choose to go land at an airport that's out in the country versus Lafayette Regional? I know military pilots, when they do cross countries they go where it's the most fun. Now what, why would they go to New Iberia instead of Lafayette? But they do it all the time. I'll guarantee you drive down to New Iberia at noon today you'll see probably four or five or maybe more aircraft from the Navy training center out of Pensacola, they're refueling, while the crew's down havin' lunch. Why isn't that in Lafayette? [Pause] Why aren't they at least [splittin' it]? [Pause] It's got to be marketing or pricing. You know, I'm the kind of guy that would rather

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sell 10,000 gallons and make a quarter on each gallon than sell 200 gallons and make a dollar on each gallon. But [Pause] that's all, to me, that's all economic impact in the city of Lafayette.

SW: Yeah, it's gowin' down-

VA: If you could, if you could get every one of those airplanes or helicopters has at least two people on board. So that means there's gonna be restaurants, 'cause what they down there is they provide 'em transportation when they land. Well how much does it cost to drive a van around? I'll bet, I'll bet there's restaurants that are close to the airport that would provide transportation to bring 'em down if they could just get into the airport. So New Iberia's getting that economic advantage.

SW: Yeah. Lafayette could be-

VA: But the rent, but the rent on the New Iberia airport's a lot cheaper, too. [Pause] I mean, I'm, I'm a consultant, I work for clients and I've had a number of opportunities to look for airport properties. And New Iberia and Abbeville are willing to... make it lucrative to get somebody to come in.

SW: It's kind of interesting-

VA: Look at the number of empty buildings down here now that PHI moved. They had big dreams before PHI moved. The buildings are still empty.

SW: It's kind of interesting because uh, the Oil Center people wanted to locate an oil center Opelousas and New Iberia were considered, but it ended up here because of the willingness of the people and the entrepreneurs here to bring that here. And now it looks like it's kind of shifted.

VA: Well, yeah, but look back. Don't say "the" people. There were "some" people who were willing. I mean, Herbert Heymann was willing to make concessions and get that in there, built the Oil Center. So you had "some" people that were really looking into the future and taking care of the city. I don't know how much the city as a general comment had to do with it. You had some people that were uh... looking into the future enough to say, "Hey, wait a minute. If we, if we can lure this here." [Slight pause] I'd, I'd say probably if it weren't for Herbert Heymann the Oil Center would be in New Iberia.

SW: You said some people, but uh, looks like it was a few of the right people. [Chuckles]

VA: Oh absolutely. Absolutely.

SW: I interviewed a, a-

VA: If you have the right piece of land, or the right amount of money, or the right set of circumstances, you can influence things like that. But if you have two of the three, you got it made. [Pause] But, you know, it's, it's interesting the, the, the growth here and, and it seems like in some areas, like in real estate and hospitals and stuff like that, Lafayette's [doin' great things?]. And then you have other areas that, well, [float around?]. [Pause]

SW: You've lived here long enough to notice some of those changes. I've lived here most of my life, so I know what you're talkin' about.

VA: Well the one thing I'll never understand is Lake Charles built Interstate 210 around the south side of Lake Charles. Literally unloaded their city streets. [Pause] Lafayette built Ambassador Caffery with a stop sign or a traffic light every 500 yards and literally tied their hands. Now back in the '70s I flew a surveyor and a city photographer out around Scott and that area, and they had already started clearing land for a limited

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access loop around the south side of Lafayette and they opted for Ambassador Caffery instead. And it would have followed basically Ambassador Caffery. I think it would've been a little further out, but not more than a half a mile. And they were already startin' to clear the right away. Now can your reali-, can you visualize where Lafayette would be today with a, a loop 210-type road around where Ambassador Caffery is? Go straight around the east side of the airport and come back out to I-10 at about Breau Bridge? Can you realize the load that that would take off of the throughway, Johnston Street, Pinhook?

SW: [Inaudible].

VA: And uh, you know, to me the city planners just blew it right there. Now they're talkin' about bringin' the interstate through the middle of town when a simple 30 degree jog would take it around the east side of the airport and line right up with the curve down in Broussard, be a lot cheaper to build. [Pause] And they're gonna two-story it so somebody can spin into the side and block it for two hours and have real traffic jams rather than little traffic jams.

SW: Yeah. I agree with you-

VA: All they'd have to do is go to New Orleans, Alexandria and see how much, Alexandria's a perfect example. They could put the interstate through La-, Alexandria by makin' two overpasses, one over each of the two traffic circles. Instead they went through downtown. Now where all the hotels and everything were out along [McCarthy?] Boulevard [Pause] motels are screamin' for business. The interstate goes through downtown. And, and the Exit 90 and Exit 80 are building up with all new stuff. And downtown Alexandria has seen no benefit whatsoever except now they have the noise of an interstate right outside their office windows. We're gonna do the same thing here.

SW: I believe so. [Pause] You gotta shake your head sometimes. [Chuckles]

VA: It, it just doesn't make any sense to me. The, the idea is to alleviate traffic problems and they come up with a plan that's gonna magnify traffic problems. [Pause]

SW: Any regrets that you had for your flying and work with PHI?

VA: No. Not at all. I had a career that I loved goin' work every morning. The only reason I left early was people problems.

SW: Uh, management?

VA: Nah. I was management. [Laughs]

SW: Oh, people under management then.

VA: Well, the old adage, you know, 90 per-, 10 percent of your people create 90 percent of your problems, it's alive and well. And uh, you know, I'd done for 28 years. I was ready for a change. And I, I certainly have no regrets in my career. I had a great career.

SW: When did you uh, retire?

VA: Eighty-four, '94.

SW: That's right you said that. And you've been consulting since?

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VA: And uh, and I've had a good, you know, I've had a good consulting career, so it's uh, so I have no complaints.

SW: You kind of shifted over into doin' something still connected to the industry, but different.

VA: Oh, I still deal with a lot of the same people.

SW: You changed jobs. And you still get to fly every now and-

VA: But, the one thing, you know the one thing the whole family agreed on the career change and we all agreed we wanted to stay here. Because I could, what I do today I could from anywhere. I get on an airplane and go somewhere. So it really doesn't matter where I live, because uh, you know, almost every week when I leave I'm traveling to somewhere. So there's not a city in the, in the states that I could live out of and not have to travel to where I work, so why not live in Lafayette. We really like it. A lot of good friends here.

SW: I've talked with a lot of people-

VA: Have no intent to ever move away.

SW: Once you establish those roots, you know, and uh, there's a lot of guys that have said that.

VA: And it-, and that's why uh, you know, that's why our, the, the turnover problems and that that we talked about earlier. If these people would stay here a few years, I don't think they'd ever. [Pause] It's just, you know, never give themselves a chance to learn the area, learn the people. So yeah. No, I enjoy it. No, no place is perfect, no job is perfect. We've sat here and talked about some negatives, but there's a tremendous, a lot of positives.

SW: Probably some more than-

VA: Oh yeah.

SW: If the positives outweigh the negatives than you're in good shape.

VA: By far. By far.

SW: Well, I think you have a lunch date with your wife that I don't want to keep you with. [VA chuckles] Uh, see what we're at here, yeah, is there anything you wanted to add or uh?

VA: No. No, but ec-, economically uh, you know, we can't just look at PHI when we look at aviation. I mean, you got the FBOs out at the airport, you've got, you know, [Paul Fornas?] out there that's been a tremendous economic advantage to the city. You've got the other [Sighs] helicopter operators.

SW: Air Log and um, Rotor Craft.

VA: Rotor Craft uh, Leasing Industrial over here at Scott, American Helicopters at Abbeville, uh... and then other companies out of Texas and that have bases throughout the area. So, you know, the influence is, you put all that together, there's a lot of payroll comin' into this part of the state. Lot of taxes being paid. [Pause] And, you know, you have the helicopter industry is a support industry for the petroleum industry, but then you have the subsupport industry that is here because of the helicopters. The parts stores, you know, Bell has a, a part's facility here. Uh, Allison Engines had an outlet here, they may still have it here, it's [World Schwartz?], [Inaudible] bought Allison. So you have all these that, you know, may be small outlets that only



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three or four people, but every one of 'em payin' property taxes on a building. You know, so it, it just kind of scales itself down.

SW: Yeah, and it just keeps going.

VA: One thing about av-, one thing about aviation, nothing they do is cheap. You know, when these uh, parish tax assessors assess those aircraft every January first and the cheapest thing they can buy to fly is one point six million. [Pause]

SW: That's, that's how much each aircraft costs?

VA: Well that's how much the cheapest one is.

SW: Cheapest one is.

VA: It goes up to five, six million. Well actually, with the Super [Inaudible] 14, 15. So when the local tax assessors go knockin' on the doors and evaluate all this inventory, oh, just, just that as well. I, I said the word "inventory" and it reminded me of the amount of inventory and spare parts they have. They're, for many years we had over 30 million dollars worth of spare parts for the fleet. [Slight pause]

SW: How much does it cost if Schlumberger wants to run three of their guys out to a rig?

VA: Oh it depends on, on what type of aircraft they use, but... [Sighing] oh. Probably 13, 14 hundred dollars a flight out.

SW: Just to run 'em out there? So-

VA: Yeah, if they just take the aircraft just for one trip. Now if they put it on a contract that would be, you know, then, then there's different pricing modes that go into effect. You have a monthly and a flight hour mode.

SW: So these, these companies are, if they have a contract, they're paying 10s of thousand dollars a, per month easy.

VA: Yeah.

SW: Just to [Inaudible].

VA: They'll pay... if they fly 80 hours a month on the smallest helicopter operating in the Gulf [Pause] they will pay in excess of 55,000 dollars a month for that, for that service. [Pause] And it gets up into the hundreds when you start talkin' about the big crew change aircraft.

SW: Yeah. And with all the activity that's goin' on out there, there's more than one oil company.

VA: Oh yeah.

SW: That's, that's, that's some change right there. [Chuckles]

VA: Oh yeah. But, you know, when the costs you have are as they are, it's the only way it's gotta be. Where you're payin' that much for equipment. [Claps] Anyway.

SW: That's quite a story. [VA laughs] I'll have to go back and, I think we're almost out of tape by the way.

HHA # 00006  
Interviewee: Albert, Vernon  
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[END OF RECORDING]

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