

**GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
PARK ARCHIVES AND RECORDS CENTER
Oral History Interview: Ron Parshall
GOGA 39008**

[FIRST TAPE - SIDE ONE]

Interviewer: John Martini, Curator of Military History, Golden Gate National Recreation Area

MARTINI: (001) Today is Thursday, July 19, 1997. My name is John Martini. I am Curator of Military History for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. This is an oral history tape of Mr. Ron Parshall who served as an Air Defense artilleryman at Nike Site 88L at Fort Barry, in the Marin Headlands. We are at the Nike Site and this oral history tape is being done for the Archives and library of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Ron, you understand that by doing this oral history tape this is going to become part of the collection for the public to use and you give up copyright for anything that we say today?

PARSHALL: (008) Yes, I do.

MARTINI: (008) All right. Introduce yourself, give me your full name.

PARSHALL: (009) My name is Ronald Wells Parshall.

MARTINI: (009) Where were you born?

PARSHALL: (010) Elyria(?), Ohio.

MARTINI: (010) What's your birthday?

PARSHALL: (010) 1934.

MARTINI: (011) Okay. Can I ask ... what were your parents names?

PARSHALL: (011) Alice ... and Wilbert Parshall. (Chuckles).

MARTINI: (012) You had to think about that one. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

PARSHALL: (013) I have two sisters. Jean and Betty.

MARTINI: (014) Did you grow up in Ohio or where?

PARSHALL: (014) Very little in Ohio. I grew up in San Francisco mainly. We came out here during the war in 1943.

MARTINI: (015) What brought you out?

PARSHALL: (016) My health. Bad asthma and pneumonia twice before I was seven years old. So, they told me to get out of the cold weather. (Laughs).

MARTINI: (017) Did it get better when you got to San Francisco?

PARSHALL: (018) Oh yeah. I am still living. (Laughs).

MARTINI: (018) Now. When you came out to San Francisco during the war, do you remember much about the war, you were young at the time?

PARSHALL: (020) Quite a bit, yes.

MARTINI: (020) Yes?

PARSHALL: (020) All of my ... a lot of my uncles were in the war. One was, you know, and they would write home and write to us because my mother was, they were my mother's brothers. So, we would get a lot of information on what's happening here and there. Had one in the Air Force and three in the Army. So, we did good.

MARTINI: (023) What part of the City?

PARSHALL: (024) San Francisco?

MARTINI: (024) Yes.

PARSHALL: (024) It's called Candlestick Cove. It's no longer there.

MARTINI: (025) Right where the park is? In that area?

PARSHALL: (025) Right where the, actually where the three new buildings that they built there that was right where the houses were.

MARTINI: (026) Okay.

PARSHALL: (026) There was no housing in San Francisco at '43 and '44. So the Navy ... my father worked for the shipyards ... so the Navy arranged for housing in Candlestick Cove which was great because there were always kids to play with all the time. It was great.

MARTINI: (029) Uh huh. I have to ask. Where did you go to school in the City?

PARSHALL: (029) I went to Denman Junior High School and Balboa High School.

MARTINI: (030) Balboa. Okay. What made you get into the Army? Did you enlist?

PARSHALL: (031) No. I was drafted.

MARTINI: (031) You were drafted?

PARSHALL: (031) Mm hmm.

MARTINI: (032) What year were you drafted?

PARSHALL: (032) I was drafted in 1959.

MARTINI: (033) When you were drafted, had you considered going into the military?

PARSHALL: (033) I almost left high school to join the Navy at one time. My father said, well, if you do that you will have to make a career out of it. So that made me think twice, and so I finished my high school and did other things. I was about twenty-four before I was drafted so I was an old man. (Chuckles).

MARTINI: (037) How old were they drafting men at that time?

PARSHALL: (037) Eighteen.

MARTINI: (038) Eighteen.

PARSHALL: (038) In fact, when I was in high school the Korean War was going on in the '50s and they were drafting right out of high school. I just happened to not turn eighteen until I graduated so I missed that draft.

MARTINI: (040) Okay.

PARSHALL: (040) And then when I graduated the War was over the next year.

MARTINI: (041) Were a lot of guys getting drafted at that time?

PARSHALL: (041) Yes.

MARTINI: (042) And at that time did people think anything like, later, during the '60s, a lot of ideas were: 'how can I get out of the draft'?

PARSHALL: (043) Never.

MARTINI: (043) How did they feel at that time?

PARSHALL: (044) Never.

MARTINI: (044) Never?

PARSHALL: (044) Never heard that. Everybody once they got drafted they just showed up and went and did what they had to do.

MARTINI: (045) Did you have any choice of branches of service?

PARSHALL: (046) No. No, they needed people in the Army. The Vietnam War was not started yet at '59, but they were still shy in the Army so that is where you went. The main draftees went to the Army.

MARTINI: (049) Did you know what specialty you were going to have?

PARSHALL: (049) No. I did not until I finished basic and they sent me to engineering school in Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

MARTINI: (051) Engineering school?

PARSHALL: (051) Right.

MARTINI: (051) Uh huh. What did you think you were going to be going into?

PARSHALL: (052) Well, they told us missiles, but I did not know what I was going to be doing. I had an extensive electrical background before I went into the Army and it just patterned out to be an electronic equipment repairman which, that's the course they were teaching.

MARTINI: (055) Did you like missiles?

PARSHALL: (055) I loved the ... I did, I never saw a missile until I got there and they had one on display in which we were formed in front of, and we had our picture taken and that perked my interest. Then going to school and studying about the missiles, everything you studied was all this machinery was something that you wouldn't get on the outside. It was unbelievable, you know. The technologies were way in advance of anything that I had ever seen.

MARTINI: (061) Even before you got into the Army the '50s were really the ... everyone was really getting hyped up about space travel and SPUTNIK and all that. Did you have any interest in rocketry or ...?

PARSHALL: (063) Well, yeah, space travel really excited me I think the only books that I ever read in high school were on space, Jules Verne type things.

MARTINI: (064) Mm. Hmm.

PARSHALL: (065) Yeah. And sports. The two things that really perked my memory.

MARTINI: (066) Did you follow any of the military technology like a lot of kids do? Build models or stuff like that?

PARSHALL: (067) I built models, I built the B-52 Hustler before I went in the Army. I built the Hercules while I was in the Army and I had a plane, a motorized plane being built when I went in the Army, and my brother-in-law finished that for me and crashed it.

(070-071)[Laughter].

MARTINI: (071) What did you know about Nike's before you got to Belvoir?

PARSHALL: (071) Not a thing.

MARTINI: (071) Really?

PARSHALL: (072) No. Not a thing. It was top secret, that's all I knew, and it was the elite part of the Army. Everybody ... when I got my assignment to go to Fort Belvoir, everybody, all of my buddies and that, were going into the infantry and they were all very envious because they said if they could they would sure want to be in that because the field that you are in was way advanced.

MARTINI: (076) I have heard that. I have heard that there is a special esprit in Air Defense.

PARSHALL: (077) Oh yeah. Everybody wanted to get into it, but which is hard because you had to have a certain background, something that would fit into this program.

MARTINI: (078) Give me a time frame here. This would be about what time?

PARSHALL: (079) 1959. The latter part of '59 and first about first four months of 1960.

MARTINI: (080) Was it ... it was called ARADCOM [NB: Army Air Defense Command] at that time?

PARSHALL: (081) ARADCOM.

MARTINI: (081) Okay. ARADCOM. They had gotten rid of those Anti-Aircraft [Artillery] ... ?

PARSHALL: (082) I never even seen those patches, the double "A" patches.

MARTINI: (082) The double "A" patches?

PARSHALL: (082) They were gone.

MARTINI: (083) Fort Belvoir during training or engineer school, were you officially in ARADCOM at that time?

PARSHALL: (084) Yeah. I was officially TDY to ARADCOM, in other words, going to school but I was a member of the ARADCOM at that time.

MARTINI: (086) Okay.

PARSHALL: (086) Although I had never been on a base.

MARTINI: (086) Were you working on missiles or additional electronics?

PARSHALL: (087) All of the associated parts of the missile were, not the actual missile itself, but like the HPU unit, hydraulic pumping unit or something like that would be broken down and things would be wrong with it and at school they taught you how to fix it. Electronic parts worked on things like air conditioning. Things like the

generators, the motors themselves, and the injectors stuff like that and how to repair them, but you never saw them all together, so it was really a puzzle, until you actually got onto a Nike base. It was, you really didn't know what you were doing. You were studying and learning, but at the same time you wondered where it all fit.

MARTINI: (095) Did you know while going through training where it would end up? Or is this all just sort of decided when you finished courses?

PARSHALL: (096) It was a real blank thing. I thought half of the, we knew, at half way through the schooling, the upper half was going to Nike, the other half would be going, with some leaders, to the Hawk system at the same time so they split the class at half times and sent the other class to study Hawks in El Paso and kept us in Fort Belvoir.

MARTINI: (101) Was any special interest or expertise, was one system considered more cutting edge than the other? Hawk or Nike?

PARSHALL: (103) No. They were both, they were both on the cutting, really similar missiles, so to speak, I mean the systems are much bigger, but than the Hawk, they are a lot smaller. We were kind of envious because these guys were going to get to go down to Texas and be in California and we were back in the Washington, DC area and now they are going to go down to Texas, we thought that was pretty special. Thank goodness we never went, the Hawk was strictly a field missile and most of those guys ended up in Germany, not in the town, but in the field so it wasn't a good ...?

MARTINI: (108) Literally in the field.

(109) [Laughter].

MARTINI: (109) So, where after Fort Belvoir.

PARSHALL: (110) Fort Belvoir. My first assignment was in Fort Niagara, New York. Buffalo air defense. I got there, I was just at Niagara site for about one week and then they sent me on to an actual missile site.

MARTINI: (113) What went on at Fort Niagara?

PARSHALL: (114) More shots, you know. It was the headquarters, that was the headquarters, the working part of the headquarters. Nothing to do with missiles but the, all the paper had to be done there and so you were stationed there for at least a week until you got assigned to

where you were going and then they, our class went up there, there was about seven of us from that class and only two of us ended out at the same site and never saw the rest of the people again.

MARTINI: (119) Ahhh. Really? Just to the wind?

PARSHALL: (120) They split you, and I saw some of my orders that shows some guy going down to Georgia or Cleveland or whatever. In fact, when I was going to the class in Fort Belvoir I don't think two of us were of the same, there was only two of us from the whole state, same state, everybody else was from a different state. A lot of people from that had gone into air defense from something else were there training at the same time and we had sergeants in the class and higher ranking people than what we were, all privates at that time so.

MARTINI: (126) Yes, I was going to ask. The ranking was it private or was it specialist?

PARSHALL: (127) Most of us were private. Oh, no, specialist after private, I would have been a specialist, yes. I never reached that high, but private first class (something seemed high?).

MARTINI: (129) So you did not go to Fort Bliss right away?

PARSHALL: (129) No. I never. It would have probably, to me, it would have been more advantageous to start out at Fort Bliss see what the system was then go to school and know what you are studying but at the same time we learned our jobs so you know, like you drive a car, you want to know all about the car, well if you go to do something with a missile you would like to see it and see what it worked like I guess the Army's plans were not that way and it worked out just as well it made us study harder I think, I really do. Everybody that went to class was really, there was a private studying, in other words, you just didn't fall asleep in class you studied and we tested each other each night and at the same time did our Army routine of cleaning, and exercised marching and KP.

MARTINI: (139) Could you have theoretically have washed out of Fort Belvoir?

PARSHALL: (140) Oh yeah. There were a few people that did that. They were people that wouldn't make it anywhere and people that borderline. You had to have more than a high school education, like I had over a year and a half in college, trade college. Four years in trade school

and another year and a half in trade college. So, I think that helped. We had a lot of brand new people in our class, brilliant people. Not myself included, but ... (Laughs) I was always amazed at what these guys knew and it was helpful for me too. Just smart people.

MARTINI: (147) So, you are at Fort Niagara and they assign you to your first actual missile battery.

PARSHALL: (148) Yes.

MARTINI: (148) Do you remember the name of it?

PARSHALL: (148) It was A Battery. It was Model City and Ajax. Strictly Ajax. What the Army was doing at that particular time, this was 1960, we were turning over the battery to the National Guard, so, I had enough training without seeing a missile to train National Guard into my job.

MARTINI: (153) Really?

PARSHALL: (153) So, I actually went out there as a trainer. I didn't do anything with the missiles, but more, just showed the people what my job would have been. I stayed there about two months or so and then I was only, and then I went to Battery B which was a combination of Hercules and Ajax site that had three rows of four. So, it had twelve launchers. It was a big site, there was close to 400 people on that site.

MARTINI: (159) Wow.

PARSHALL: (160) Yeah, you ate in shifts and you got out of there as soon as possible and it was a very busy base.

MARTINI: (161) When you got there, what was your unit assignment?

PARSHALL: (162) When I got to B Battery. When I got to Grand Island let's call it.

MARTINI: (164) Uh huh.

PARSHALL: (164) My job? I was still a launcher crewman and trained that way, but I was assigned to the IFC.

MARTINI: (165) IFC?

PARSHALL: (165) Yeah. I did a lot of painting and stuff like that. I did not know that job whatsoever, but I could handle the generators in the IFC and I could handle cutting lawn and painting and so that is what they put me to.

MARTINI: (168) IFC is ...? For the tape.

PARSHALL: (168) Yes. Integrated Fire Controls.

MARTINI: (169) Radars and?

PARSHALL: (169) Radars and radar vans.

MARTINI: (170) What specific ARADCOM unit was this?

PARSHALL: (171) How do you mean?

MARTINI: (171) Whatever artillery, what was the unit number?

PARSHALL: (172) Well, it was the 44th and then they got changed to the same one that Ezio [Nurisio] was in. I can't remember. No, I can't remember. I skidded half the week. (Laughs).

MARTINI: (176) Afterward we will write it down.

PARSHALL: (176) Yeah. Yeah. I'll get it for you.

MARTINI: (176) So when, so you were only there at Fort Niagara rather than Niagara sites for a matter of months?

PARSHALL: (177) That's it. And then it became December, uh, it became, you know in the Army you can get thirty days off a year. It became time where I could hitch a ride back east, I mean back to San Francisco. So, I came back on a visit for a week. I heard about this site for somehow. I don't know how I knew about it, but I heard about this site. It just befuddles me how I knew about it. And I drove out here and I parked right up at the top gate there at the building within two seconds I had two MPs on me, and I was in uniform, and they were asking me what I was doing there and I told them. Well, while they're talking to me, a fella from Georgia comes running up the hill to see what I was doing there too and he happened to be the same type of job I was, a 3-5-7, and I told him what I was here for. I says "You know, I just looking around to see if anyone was interested in swapping with me." He said "Sure." And all we did was exchange

names and I went back to Niagara Falls and started processing paper and within twenty days we were given orders to swap. We paid our own transportation, and I just walked onto this base doing the same job. It was great.

MARTINI: (194) Was that unusual, could a lot of guys do that?

PARSHALL: (195) I could have, yeah, I think the Battery Officer would have complained a lot if I had a position, I was just filling in time there until they were going to put me down in the launching area. I'm sure there was probably somebody retiring or something or moving on, and they needed a hole and they just stuck me up in the IFC until they had room for me. When I was at Battery A I had not had my secret clearance yet, but I was allowed in the pit because that was really not a, you know, like a, like the Hercules. It was fairly well known what they were about and so by the time I was at Battery B, I was given my secret clearance and I think that's what they were mainly were waiting for to send me down into the pit. And in between that time, the officer approved the swap and I got out of there. Well, being so far away from home. It was ridiculous. I mean they send you, not ridiculous, but I mean they send you from San Francisco to Niagara Falls, you throw a rock you would have been overseas, collecting overseas payment, it just didn't make any, I just was not comfortable there. When we got to, when we got to Battery A in Model City, snow was above the barracks. You couldn't get down to the missile. They had just had one of those big Buffalo storms. Could not get down to the missile it was just, I developed an attitude right away. This wasn't for me because I came to the West Coast because, you know, and I was willing to go anywhere the Army was going to send me, but if I had a chance to do something different that's what I did. Talking it over with other guys and what, you know, I really don't know how I knew this base was out here because nobody else did, but I lucked out.

MARTINI: (217) You said the other guy that was here was the same job series, you said a 3-5-7? What's that?

PARSHALL: (219) That's a class. A "guided missiles electronic equipment repairman."

MARTINI: (220) Okay.

PARSHALL: (220) And point ten was what I was and which meant school trained. He was not schooled trained, he was job trained but still they let it go

and they did the transfer. He liked it because on a weekend pass you could make it to Georgia and back where in California, it takes an airplane and you got more than a weekend pass to make it back. So, he was like, you know a few hundred miles away from home.

MARTINI: (225) And you ended up just a few miles from home.

PARSHALL: (225) Yeah right. (Laughter).

MARTINI: (226) When you got here, obviously you were pretty happy because you are home again.

PARSHALL: (227) Very happy.

MARTINI: (228) Give me the, so I can keep the time frame going, about what month would you have gotten here? I think this is 1960 now we are talking?

PARSHALL: (230) Towards October or November of 19..., maybe a little early in October, September, or July of 1960.

MARTINI: (233) July of 1960? Fog months.

PARSHALL: (233) Yeah. I remember the weather because back there we were in khakis. We got out here, we were in overcoats. Not overcoats, but you know always wearing a field jacket at all times, not lined. Everyday I stood I'd get this field jacket and the weather was not like it is now it has changed, very definitely has changed.

MARTINI: (239) Today, this is summer. Brilliant sun.

PARSHALL: (240) Never happened here for me.

MARTINI: (241) Did certain [Nike] sites, say right around San Francisco, have reputations of being good sites and others sites being sort of mediocre or were they ...?

PARSHALL: (242) The worst site that I could remember to be stationed was Angel Island. Only because if you were on a pass or if you were out for, if you got allowed to go somewhere for the day, you had to travel by boat. It was a Navy boat, I believe a Navy boat, leaving for Angel Island and the last trip was twelve o'clock, and if you had forgotten yourself and missed that last trip then you were AWOL automatically and Articles got thrown at you. I remember a couple of

times we were in Sausalito and we started knowing the other guys in a different Batteries because we would all hang around the pizza place down there and talk about, not talk about what we were doing, but just talk that we were in the Army, yeah, what are you doing?, we're in missiles, oh, we're in this, oh yeah? da da da da da. Anyway, I can remember, I had a car, you know, and not many people on these bases had cars, except the officers. At \$78.00 a month, you really cannot afford it, but I had had a car before I went in so, I had a car. I remember about three times having to rush these guys down to catch that last boat. Whereas, we would did not have to show up until five o'clock, but there was no way they could make it there by five, because they were stuck. Unbelievable.

MARTINI: (258) So that was it's really only drawback.

PARSHALL: (259) Yeah. Pacifica was a drawback in even in worse weather than here, but nobody I have ... uh ... I had the luck of, just before I got out, of driving a Major around to inspect all of the bases, and when you get out you talk to the other guys. I never heard any bad talk about any of these bases. They were all spic and span. It was a real good duty, it was long hours and you did not get a lot of time off, but it was very, it was always interesting, something new. And a new directive would come out and you got to change this part, or change that part, or stuff like that. Always something to do, so your day was full.

MARTINI: (268) So, what was your MOS here at this Battery?

PARSHALL: (269) I was a, when I first got here I was a Generator Operator, they called them Generator Operators and Launcher Crewmen.

MARTINI: (270) Launcher Crewmen.

PARSHALL: (270) And then towards the end of, about three months before I got out, I was doing that but they had checked our hearing and found out that I could not go near the generators anymore. So, I was still a Launcher Crewmen, but they made me in charge of the IFCs generators up there, so I could take care of those because they did not have the air starters on it. They didn't go inside or hurt your ears, they were just forty KWs. They were very small generators, they purred, they didn't make any noise at all, they were electric starts too. Our generators were 250 hp Cummins, air-started, goes up to high decibels and at that time you did not have to wear ear muffs, and but

by the time we found out about it all of our Generator Operators had to do some other job. (Chuckles). Lost now.

MARTINI: (283) Really. You have hearing loss?

PARSHALL: (284) Yeah. The whole ear is gone, that ear is gone, and the high range on this one, I got ringing in my ears all the time now. So, I am just like, ever fired an M-1? it sounds just like that to me all the time, that ring that goes.

MARTINI: (286) Wow.

PARSHALL: (287) Yeah. What was ... I would like to mention this ... what was good about taking care of those generators, I liked it because, it was a way of filling in a day. I would have to go to the Presidio and check out a truck and then bring the truck over here and, only Army personnel were allowed, Army trucks were allowed up there. I couldn't take my own car up there unless you were in that, then you could take your own car so, anybody else had to bring an Army car up there so you made you go all the way to the Presidio, check out a car, go up there and do what I had to do, then take the truck all the way back into here. By then it was supper. (Laughs) It was kind of a nice day. I didn't do that everyday of the week and the other days we would practice launching.

MARTINI: (296) Yeah. Let's come back to that later, because I know that vehicles here, there was a small fleet of vehicles assigned to this site.

PARSHALL: (298) Yes. Right. Definitely was.

MARTINI: (299) Give me a basic layout of the different parts of the Battery when you were here, the components?

PARSHALL: (301) It started where you slept. That was the Admin area. All of the office work up there. There were wooden buildings at that time, two story high, easy to keep care of because the newer buildings you had to polish the floors all of the time because they had floor tile. These wooden floors all they wanted was them swept. They didn't so, that's all you had to do. So, that was kind of easy to take care of and you would walk into that or walk into any place and everything would be spic and span. Your bed had to be made properly and all your uniforms had to be lined up ready for inspection at all times. In fact, you even hated sleeping on your bed because you had it made in the morning and there is not that much time to make it. It had a little,

just a little small area that they had for like, you could buy Coke's or candy, writing paper, stuff like that. That's where we assembled in the morning. Everyone assembled there and a few stories like that of the fog coming down when you are assembling, while you are assembling out there you could not see the guy next to you. We had a fire drill there a couple of times. You actually had to bring out a fire extinguisher and stand there and like you are fire drilling. The road up there where, it is still there, had a big chain over it with "Coast Guard - No Admittance." You could not go past that. Orders on this, at the base at all times, you could not go into any of the bunkers except for the ones we were using.

MARTINI: (324) Like Battery Alexander?

PARSHALL: (324) Battery Alexander. We could go in only certain parts of that. Our office, the motor pool, there was a little bathroom up above there, I don't know if we used that or not, but that's all. You could not go into the big room because it was sealed.

MARTINI: (328) Yeah?

PARSHALL: (328) Yeah. There was only a couple of little, small offices that we used and then the motor pool used that other section. So, there was a ballfield, we used that as a ballfield and a parking lot on the other side [of Btry. Alexander] and we played baseball there a few times. It was hard to get the guys to get out after they, after a day of working to play ball. We had a basketball team here. We played the Russians one time.

MARTINI: (333) From where?

PARSHALL: (333) Just from San Francisco. There was a Russian team there and we played them ...

MARTINI: (334) Uh. Huh.

PARSHALL: (334) ... A little grudge fight. (Laughs). A few fists were flashed. But we had the, we had the height though, we had a man here named Rombowski who was a Lieutenant in charge of our launching area. He was about 6'4" or so. He was a, he helped us and that was good. Out of that same area, towards the end, we had a, oh, two people from each Battery, we were selected for an Honor Guard. So that was another thing that I got onto because I was a very good marcher, evidently. I could take orders and march and that kind of stuff so I

got onto the Honor Guard. That was another nice thing because one day a week, all your duties are gone and you go over there and get dressed up and practice. We presented, we had a couple of parades. Dwight Minnich, who was in charge of guard dogs over in Site 87, participated in the same parade I did. There was a missile out there and all that. It was kind of nice.

MARTINI: (350) When you say "go over there", you are talking about ...?

PARSHALL: (350) At the Presidio.

MARTINI: (350) The Presidio.

PARSHALL: (351) Yeah. Right where the Honor Guard was at the Presidio. Right up, boy I don't know if it was where the Log Cabin is, up there or if it was down on the main parade field. I think it was down on the main parade field. The very first house was the Honor Guard.

MARTINI: (355) Yes. Near the National Cemetery?

PARSHALL: (355) Right.

MARTINI: (356) Yes. So up there at the barracks area, the Admin?

PARSHALL: (357) Mm. Hmm.

MARTINI: (358) Did the guys at the IFC and the Launcher sections, were they housed in separate barracks?

PARSHALL: (359) What they did I didn't know about. I was only in with Launcher crewmen and motor pool. I believe they slept up top. I never saw too many IFC people.

MARTINI: (362) Did IFC and the launcher section, did they socialize a lot or was there rivalry?

PARSHALL: (363) I think there was a lot of rivalry. I never even met half of them until we went down to fire a missile one time and then I met all of these guys that I had never seen before. (Laughs) I wondered where they had come from.

MARTINI: (366) Up there, up in the fog.

PARSHALL: (366) I had been up to the IFC, but most of, when you go up, being on this base it's just like if you were to ask me. Our office was the second office over there under, what did you call it, Fort ...?

MARTINI: (370) Battery Alexander.

PARSHALL: (370) Battery Alexander. If you look at it there are two offices on the right side. Ours was on the right side. I don't know what was next door. I don't know what was in that, now I do, but that big open space. I don't know what was in there. I know what was in the motor pool because I a few times I had an association, I got a close friend there and, but ...

MARTINI: (375) It was very specialized, I don't say compartmentalized information. You really knew what you had to know.

PARSHALL: (376) Yeah. This paint(something)(?), I never had anything to do with. Though, I did a lot of painting. There wasn't only paint(something)(?) but the paint was brought to you. You know. That is kind of you know pushing it, I never was but once was in the A-pit, I mean, the B-pit never but was once was down there.

MARTINI: (382) But, you were in A-pit a lot?

PARSHALL: (382) A-pit was my ...

MARTINI: (382) That was your pit?

PARSHALL: (382) That was my station, yeah.

MARTINI: (384) Okay, the Admin area, and then the IFC on top of the hill we call Hill 88. This is the Launcher area. Technology: were there still Ajax here? Was this Hercules and Ajax, or just all Ajax?

PARSHALL: (387) No. There was no Ajax when I was here.

MARTINI: (388) Okay. It was Hercules.

PARSHALL: (388) It was the '60s. It was gone.

MARTINI: (388) Okay.

PARSHALL: (389) Not even looking like there was any Ajax here. They were all gone. Definitely Hercules. Bright and shiny too. Pretty missiles.

MARTINI: (390) Mm Hmm.

PARSHALL: (390) Very pretty.

MARTINI: (391) Obviously we don't have a full battery of guys to do maintenance around here but does the site generally look as it did at that time or are there ...

PARSHALL: (393) Oh, except for the building we are in, except for that building, everything looks the same.

MARTINI: (394) Mm Hmm.

PARSHALL: (395) There was no grass to cut. It was all brown. The only grass we cut was up by the upper fence above the launching area. For some reason we cut some grass up there, it was kind of like a hill. In fact, the last I was here. I was cutting grass up there. (Laughs). Everything was in top shape though. There was no cracks on the floor like down now in A-pit there's cracks. You could eat off that floor. It was in very good shape.

MARTINI: (404) What about the people that were here, do you remember the names of like the Commanding Officer and your Section Chief?

PARSHALL: (406) I remember our Section Chief was Bohan.

MARTINI: (406) Peter Bohan?

PARSHALL: (407) Peter Bohan.

MARTINI: (407) Right.

PARSHALL: (407) And over him, not over him, but in conjunction with a Lieutenant named Rombowski(?). He was in charge. The Sergeant that was in charge of me I can't remember his last name and that's about ... Yeah. I can't remember the officers. I got it at home but I didn't have much to do with officers. (Chuckles). I think I told you, but I am officer shy.

MARTINI: (416) Do you remember how many guys would have been assigned down here to the launcher?

PARSHALL: (418) Right. Just in the launching area, seven per unit with a Sergeant in charge.

MARTINI: (419) With a Sergeant in charge. What was the total, fourteen with a Sergeant? Sixteen, for both pits?

PARSHALL: (420) Two Sergeants. Excuse me. One in each pit. One in charge of each pit.

[FIRST TAPE - SIDE TWO]

Interviewer: John Martini, Curator of Military History, Golden Gate National Recreation Area

MARTINI: (000) This is side two of the Ron Parshall interview. Just before we ran out of tape on the other side we were talking about the people who lived inside here at the launcher section. There were the launcher... the missilemen?

PARSHALL: (002) Mm Hmm.

MARTINI: (002) Is that the correct terminology?

PARSHALL: (003) Mm. Hmm.

MARTINI: (003) Missilemen. Then there was the MP section, right?

PARSHALL: (003) Mm. Hmm.

MARTINI: (004) Yeah, and how many of them would there have been on a given day?

PARSHALL: (004) Two.

MARTINI: (004) Two?

PARSHALL: (005) One would take care of the front gate and one would take care of the launcher area. And at night, the two would join together at the launching area, or take turns.

MARTINI: (006) With the dog?

PARSHALL: (007) Yeah. They were not part of our outfit, though. They had nothing to do with us.

MARTINI: (007) Did they have barracks up in the same complex?

PARSHALL: (008) I don't know where they slept. (Laughs). They probably did to tell you the truth, but they were probably not sleeping when we were sleeping or maybe they were, yeah, they stayed up all night.

MARTINI: (010) If the battery had the Duty, what would the timetable be? How many hours, here, at the site? You rotate crews, how would that work?

PARSHALL: (012) We would be here all the time until we were off duty. It would be a full crew. Both sections would be ready to operate and that was a problem too because at night we would have to be close enough to the missiles so we slept in that little building across the, above the launching area and when you have two crews in there and you only got like five beds there's not enough room. So, everybody else sleeps on the couch. And the cops, not the cops, the MPs from the Presidio used to patrol out here all the time so they would be in there too half the time because they had coffee and doughnuts. We had a very good cook on when I was here that when we were on 'hot' he would always arrange you know about eleven, twelve o'clock to take some cakes, cookies or something like that, plus the coffee. It was very nice. He didn't have to, you know. (Chuckles).

MARTINI: (021) Let's pause. We will go outside and we'll walk around.

PARSHALL: (022) Sure.

MARTINI: (024) We are, theoretically, just standing inside the main gate. When you guys were taking over the Duty, did you enter through the main gate, or through the upper gate at the 'three sisters' [NB: indicates the three warehouses on Field Road], or Battery Alexander? Logistically, how did it work out?

PARSHALL: (027) Battery Alexander, generally. Yeah. First thing you did was Assembly up in the [Administration] area. Then when they released you from there, you had breakfast and then you went, you go to your assigned position which is always Battery Alexander. You got your daily trip tickets there. The typewriter was there, the table was there, you did all that kind of work and then you went down and did, and presented yourself at what you had to do at the table then you went down, like we first show up at the generators and switch them over they had been on all night long so we would phase them out and

switch them over for the day. They could probably run on one generator instead of two.

MARTINI: (034) So, every time that the Battery had the Duty, the generators were running?

PARSHALL: (035) Mm Hmm. When I was here. We had no PG&E power. So, the generator was going night and day. So, being a generator operator, that was a big deal because you had to be there night and day. Somebody had to be around this area at all times, in other words, you had to sleep in here and there because if the generators went down there was nobody here. The MPs did not know how to turn them on or off so a generator operator. I believe there was about three of us here and we did the shift here.

MARTINI: (041) So, when the Battery had the duty, the MPs might be the only people down here and everybody else would be up in the ready room?

PARSHALL: (042) If it happened at night it would all depend, if we were on fifteen minute alert, we would be up there watching television or something and if the alarm did go on, the MPs would just raise the dogs and get rid of them and open the gates for us. That upper gate, we, the Sergeant in charge had the key to that one, but everything else they had to let us in because they were armed and (something) plus themselves and the guard dogs.

MARTINI: (049) Yeah. Let's talk about security at the site and the double fences. If someone were entering this site on official duty, but they were not part of the battery, what would the procedure be?

PARSHALL: (051) They would have to come through the main gate and they would get a pass there to put on there, and from that point on there was always a guard with them. Whether they were President of the United States or whatever, they had to have a guard with them. So, one of the guards would be with this group, or one person, and he would only be allowed in this first area, he would not be allowed in the exclusion area until he went through the second MP who took that badge and gave him another badge to wear inside the exclusion area. Never be alone, never allowed down in the pits alone or anything like that. In fact, the rule of the day was: two people in the pits at all times. Never could go down there by yourself.

MARTINI: (058) Was that for safety or to ...?

PARSHALL: (059) For everything. Yeah. Safety and that you didn't sabotage or take pictures or whatever. Whatever was necessary.

MARTINI: (060) I understand smoking was prohibited?

PARSHALL: (061) That was death. Smoking was death. I imagine you could smoke, I never smoked at all, but I imagine you could smoke in this area [NB: indicates the area outside the Assembly Building], but once you got towards the guardhouse, you had to put all, anything that would light a fire, in a bucket that they had there right next to the gate and then you could walk in. But, if you ever got caught with a Zippo [lighter] or anything like that, that is just as about as bad as being AWOL. You're gonna serve some time doing something. They would KP you. Whatever they got for you. Plus it would go on your record.

MARTINI: (067) You used the term "a guard with you."

PARSHALL: (067) Mm Hmm.

MARTINI: (068) MP or someone from the ...?

PARSHALL: (068) MP. Not us, no. no. It would be one of these MPs like I told you before. The MPs were not part of our unit they were separate MPs. Up in the IFC it was a different arrangement. They each took care of being a guard, and down here because, of the weapons, they had to have professional MPs down here.

MARTINI: (072) And ...?

PARSHALL: (073) They're always 6-foot, 8-foot tall, 400 pounds and mean.

MARTINI: (074) What were relations like with the MPs?

PARSHALL: (074) Very bad.

MARTINI: (074) Really?

PARSHALL: (075) We didn't talk to them, they didn't talk to us. They were a snotty group of people. They were doing their job, I imagine, (Laughing) but I always thought they were pretty ... well, just doing their job. They did it well, too.

MARTINI: (078) Tell me about the dogs. I keep hearing about the dogs.

PARSHALL: (078) The dogs. German Shepherds, we had four of them, at least, four of them. Each dog weighed over ninety pounds and they would snarl at even their own people. If you go anywhere near the back gate, you would get attacked probably. They would want to come right through that fence at you. Whenever they were in training, they [NB: the MPs] would come to the launching area, and grab one of us. Put us in the padding and get us some stick and all, we'd all get tossed down and be very scared of those dogs after that. You would get a good fear of those dogs. Respect.

MARTINI: (086) Were the dogs out during the day?

PARSHALL: (086) Out during the day? Yeah. But I think they put all but what was on duty that night, one or two of them at a time, and the rest would be locked in their cages. But during the day, they roamed free. The handlers were always working with the dogs or the MPs that were on duty that day. Not that day, but I mean, but the dogs would be with them. During the day we had no dogs in this area, thank goodness. (Laughs). Yeah, when you come down that hill and the siren goes off and you are in that status of going downhill, you can see it is exactly like it is right today. It is terrible. It is very dangerous running down there. The only thing you worry about, not falling or anything, is hopefully they put those guard dogs away. (chuckling) Because they would go right after you. They don't like people (Laughs).

MARTINI: (096) The building here, the Warhead Building ...? Did you have any access to this?

PARSHALL: (096) Yes. I did.

MARTINI: (097) Uh huh.

PARSHALL: (097) Yes. The period of time I was here, we took one missile off-line and assembled a new missile inside the warhead building. We did not have the assembly building that is there now. It was just this building, everything was done outside, assembling it, bringing it in, and then the warhead would be delivered and installed. It was picked up at the front gate. There was armed guards and at least six people with rifles going all the way in one (something) and back, going in through there, and (something)(?) and guards were there. (Something) take off(?)

MARTINI: (104) So you guys at the Battery would be under during this?

PARSHALL: (106) Yeah. They issued us weapons and with orders to shoot to kill. It looked like a parade, you are marching with this thing on rollers. Actually push it down. There is ... no vehicle from that gate forward came in here. So, we pushed it down and ring the building while they are carrying it inside and then after that they send us back what we were doing.

MARTINI: (110) Did it arrive in a special security convoy?

PARSHALL: (111) No. It was just a regular Army truck. I imagine it was delivered over to the Presidio and convoyed over here, but when it got to this station, it was just in one truck and lowered down at the gate. They picked it up off (something) carried it (something)(?)

MARTINI: (115) Did it come in one of the “case ballistic - inert” type canisters?

PARSHALL: (116) Yes. And that was what was wheeled inside, and then the doors closed.

MARTINI: (117) At this time were people allowed out here? Were tourists and visitors running around at all?

PARSHALL: (118) Never. All the time that I was here. No. They had a lot of visitors from the Presidio, a lot of visitors from Washington, a lot of scientists would show up on special tours. This was the show site of the Bay Area. They could fly the helicopter up in the IFC and they could land the helicopter down here if they wanted to. It was easy access and it was beautiful. I mean, it was plain but it was beautiful. This is one of the prettiest sites I was ever on. Niagara Falls was nice, but it was flat, barren land. You were two miles away from the nearest people or highway. So, it was like being stuck on a rock. You couldn't do much. Here, you have a lot of viewsheds, you had a lot of deer at that time. I loved animals.

MARTINI: (128) When you are talking about moving the canister?

PARSHALL: (128) Mm Hmm.

MARTINI: (129) What kept tourists from stopping and taking pictures?

PARSHALL: (129) They would be never. There are signs posted. In fact, I remember the first sign I saw was up right about at the open spot. That is where I parked my car and got out and then the MPs got me, that sign right in front of me "No unauthorized photography whatsoever, do not stop here, keep going." They faced them each way, they got me. (Laughs) Yeah, and they were up there so fast. When I drove up here, I didn't drive slow and I knew I had to get up to where I could park. I couldn't park on this road, you can't park on this road. So, I got up to this parking area and pulled in and boom! (Laughs). They must have been watching me all along.

MARTINI: (137) Do you remember any non-official people trying to get in? Any security threats or ...?

PARSHALL: (138) Never. No, I think this was pretty tight. The only way to get in here at that time was through the tunnels. You could not get in from the upper [Conzelman] road. That was either off limits or not usable or whatever it was. So when you get through the tunnel there was a guard dog and guard on one side, two guards on the other side so, you were either stopped going each way. They would ask you what you were doing and I just told them I was in here looking and so, they let me in. I was in uniform. But I actually told them what I was doing so they said okay, but uh.

MARTINI: (145) Were civilians running around the Headlands like they do today?

PARSHALL: (145) No. They could go to Baker Beach or they could go visit anybody in the other, all of those buildings were still there. The Coast Guard was right up in the Admin area so they were like civilians and to me they weren't in uniform either, but they were not even allowed to stop and we were not allowed in their area either, so it was. No. I never saw any cars stop, I never saw any civilians up this high. Probably a few Congressmen that's as close as it comes.

MARTINI: (153) What are the different kind of designations for the security fences?

PARSHALL: (154) Exclusion areas. That's around the launching area only. The outer perimeter fence goes around, right completely around the launching area but on the other side it is just where the missiles are stored. That requires a separate pass. There was actually a gate in the back [NB: indicates Btry. Alexander] that we came in through and then you would walk right in. There were MPs back there too.

MARTINI: (159) Oh yeah?

PARSHALL: (159) Yeah. Some guards, very small house back there.

MARTINI: (161) So, there was actually a structure back there?

PARSHALL: (161) Mm hmm. Right.

[Sounds of a gate opening. Ron and John going through it]

MARTINI: (164) When going in and out of the launcher area itself, would the small personnel gate or the big gate be used?

PARSHALL: (165) Cars went in the big gate, and the side gate was over here and that was a double gate. See as that ... Where they boarded with the wood [NB: indicates wooden foot bridge]. It was the same across there, right in front, where they could drive in. It was a double gate. That gate would always be open when we came down. And so all I had to do was run across there and run down the ladder.

MARTINI: (170) Okay. So the gate that is now missing?

PARSHALL: (170) Yeah.

MARTINI: (170) It was ... that was the one?

PARSHALL: (170) Yeah. This was not there [NB: indicates personnel gate].

MARTINI: (171) Really?

PARSHALL: (171) Yeah. I never saw this. Either that double gate there or the double gate over here.

[Discussion fades out]

MARTINI: (175) We are in the [A] pit, we had a little problem, but we are back on the air. Ron, do what you did before and describe what it looked like, and what feelings there were, when you first entered this?

PARSHALL: (178) As you came down, the first time that I came down here was through that steep ladder through the safety corridor, you came out here and there is six brand new missiles standing in front of you look like a shiny new car. You are just awed by the feeling that, all this

big power and everything that you have been studying about was right here. The floors you could eat off, they were very clean, everything was in its place. All of the machinery was like brand new so, I mean it, it was unbelievable. It still is spectacular to see them sitting here even though you know they can't do anything.

MARTINI: (186) And there would have been six, three on each side?

PARSHALL: (186) There would have been six. Three on each side. Higher power on the left and the standards would have been on the right.

MARTINI: (188) How could you tell them apart?

PARSHALL: (188) Well they had, the higher power had the flags in front of them: red, green, yellow. Red, green, yellow. The red being the highest, the yellow being the lowest, and the ones on the right side were standard 1100 pound [TNT] warheads.

MARTINI: (192) When you came down, what was the job of the crewmen when you got an alert, whichever?

PARSHALL: (194) My first job, I was supposed to be the first man down the ladder and to go all the way over to the left side, slide underneath the missile because when there are six missiles there is no room to walk down between them so you would go over to the side, slide down the missile, get in the back side. My job was to pick out a missile, with another crewman, and slide it on to the elevator and the Sergeant would ride up to the top and then slide it over, I would be on the back side sliding it over to the number three position on the right side. Then while we were moving the missile over, if there was a call for more than one missile, the other two crewmen would then slide another missile on and bring it up. We would take it down the rail where it went, and they would be going down again looking for another missile, if it was being called for. When I was here, the most we had up above was two missiles. So, it ... we ran that drill hundreds of times so everybody knew their position. Plus the motor pool used to fill in if somebody was on vacation or something so, we also trained them in moving the missiles around and what position they would take. In fact, our panel operator was the head of the motor pool. That was his job, yeah. He was the head of the motor pool. He was the head of the motor pool but he was in charge of the panel.

MARTINI: (212) The room back here, I have heard called the panel room, sometimes called it the crew safety room?

PARSHALL: (213) We call it the crew safety room, But it was actually where the panel was.

MARTINI: (214) If you had gone to a real launch, that is where everybody would have retreated?

PARSHALL: (215) Correct. Yeah. You would have not been in here in case there was a problem. It was a lot safer back there plus they had the air conditioner, I mean the exhaust fans going, if you did have a launch you would probably get a lot of smoke down here. So, they had a way of getting it out. It was a lot safer than being up above, if you are up above you are considered dead because of the flame coming out.

MARTINI: (219) Where would the MPs go?

PARSHALL: (219) I don't know where they went. Well, they were safe in their area. They were far enough out of the exclusion area unless we had a misfire. They probably just stayed in the building at the post. (Laughs). I wouldn't want to have been there.

MARTINI: (223) Did anyone ever say what would have happened if you had gone into action and fired of the entire pit full of missiles?

PARSHALL: (224) Yeah. We would have probably have been the first target that they would have taken out of us. So, we probably, between the two Batteries, enough planes were coming we would have been eliminated.

MARTINI: (226) Really?

PARSHALL: (227) There was no guns in our possession, here whatsoever. So, we couldn't fire back. Our job was over.

MARTINI: (229) And you knew when you were at these sites that you were targets?

PARSHALL: (230) Yeah. You just figured it out. You are the target. If they want to get rid of you, get rid of this so they can come through. We figured it would be close to impossible, they would have to fight the Navy first, then the Air Force and then us. So, unless they sent over a lot of planes, I doubt if they would have got through.

MARTINI: (234) What did they tell you about the reality of the level of threat at that time? This is even before the Cuban missile crisis?

PARSHALL: (236) We figured that any time we had a fifteen minute warning, every time we were called down here to get a missile out, that we were actually at war. It just felt that way. All of the publicity was that way. Russia was not cooperating on the table as they talked to us they were very aggressive, they were infringing on our air space everyday, so it was a threat. Once they hit up Alaska or come even further into Canada, the whole United States was put on alert, not knowing which direction they were coming. Because they could come through Cuba in the south or wherever, so every time we had a practice we figured we were at war, and it felt like that because nobody would tell you anything until it was over. And then you would say, 'Wow that was just a practice? Okay. Thank you'. (Laughter). It kept you prepared. We were over prepared, not over prepared, but we knew our job and knew what to do and were very confident and had a lot of competent people so. The officers especially that I met on these sites were a step above anything. They were great. They knew everybody's job not only their own job, but they knew everybody else's job. We had a lot of confidence in them too.

MARTINI: (253) Tell the story again about the night when the IFC acquired something.

PARSHALL: (255) Okay. We were at fifteen minute alert and we got the siren go off and we are running down, and the call was for one missile at that time. We got the missile up in position and run all of your checks to make sure you could plug in the squib, and the last thing you do is plug in the squib but you don't actually do that. About that time you get a call from the IFC saying that it was just a test, everything is fine, da da da. We never got that, we got the command to plug it in. Our Sergeant in charge that night says ... I was standing next to, behind him ... and he had the earphones on. I didn't hear what was said to him but he kept on saying "Are you sure, sir?", "Are you sure, sir?" He repeated it five or six times and he was practically screaming it the last time making sure this man was telling him the right thing and the command was to plug it in which meant that we were going to fire it. Because that was the end result. You never plugged it in. It was too dangerous to plug it in.

MARTINI: (269) Who told him to actually plug it in?

PARSHALL: (269) Umm. The man in charge of the IFC for that night. It was the night shift. It was about three o'clock in the morning, actually. And so after we plugged it in we're, the sergeant and I, both are running down here. He put the keys in the console back there. We got in contact with them. It took at least five minutes before we phoned out, and then it was finally said, that 'this is just a test.' They never for the whole five minutes ... all we would have had to do was just shut up and fire it. We were never given that command, but they were going through other tests at the same time. We thought waiting for the target to come closer. That's all we thought we were doing. And well, that fifteen minute alert generally means that a plane will be here in fifteen minutes, but we had that missile up in less than five minutes, so we got ten minutes to spare by the time you got everything down here. And it's "tick, tick, tick," waiting for something to happen. We thought we were at war. I definitely was very fearful at that time that we would be at war, and then you start thinking of San Francisco would have been gone if we don't do our job. You start wondering, there is nothing more that you can do because it's all in their hands then. The missile is plugged in and ready to go and you are ... what I would be wondering ... why they had only called for one missile, you know. Didn't make any sense to me. If we are at war, let's get them up there! (Laughs).

MARTINI: (287) So, what was the story, why did he call it in?

PARSHALL: (287) Uh. It was a Lieutenant in charge of that and he was using the wrong command. The problem in that day, well, it wasn't a problem, but you had to know the code of the day. There was always a two word like "sling shot" or something like that. Two word for the day. And it was universal in the Bay Area. So, that same code would be for everybody. So when he sent it down, that means plug it in. We're at war, we got to go. And at that time, that is why he kept on asking and asking is to clarify between him and them. When you plug in a missile it could go off at that time, not firing, but you could have some problem even though you had checked it out.

MARTINI: (298) I guess that the code word, was that throughout all of the sites and that was used ...?

PARSHALL: (300) Eleven Bay Area sites. Back east they used the same two words. They used two words.

MARTINI: (301) Was there a target out there?

PARSHALL: (301) There was a target. It turned out to be an airliner coming in. At that time you had to approach our mainland at a certain angle you couldn't just come in at any angle, you had a certain angle, the responder box was supposed to be responding. I don't know if it did or not. The IFC would have been the only one to know that, and this guy is giving us the orders that this is the wrong thing. We would have shot it out of the sky. We would have had to, you know, because why take a chance? But luckily something got straightened out there and we got called down. Had an entire [required?] meeting the next day as to "what did you do," "why did you keep repeating that, Sergeant?" "Why did you keep repeating, why did you keep repeating?" And then he kept on telling his story that that's not proper. What the man was doing. The Lieutenant was gone the next day. He was no longer on site. He probably went through basic training again. (Laughs).

MARTINI: (315) What happened?

PARSHALL: (316) It's the checks and balances on this system that are supposed to be the safety of this system and unfortunately the Sergeant should have not said that. He should have just plugged it in and left. He got reprimanded, but he was very good at his job. I knew he was doing the right thing because this guy up there was not, he did not know. He should have said this a test or he should have used a different code word which meant, you know, if you want us to plug it in, we're not at war. But that is what you want to happen.

MARTINI: (323) Okay. That's what it would have simulated.

PARSHALL: (323) Yeah. Because. Because.

MARTINI: (324) He just let you guys, like, mentally go to war.

PARSHALL: (325) During the day when we were running tests and had a missile upstairs so they could operate the ailerons or the, anything that they wanted to operate here. The same situation would go. We wouldn't be as fast running, but we would get the missile up and get it in position and would be ready to fire, do our test, plug it in and they would run the test, actually, on the missile and it would take about fifteen minutes. That's where this air conditioning came from [NB: indicates hose to guidance section] after we burned out several of the, because there was no air going in there, and after fifteen minutes, these things, they are only meant for a flight of less than five

minutes. Three minutes, actually. They, they invented this little air conditioning unit to keep the guidance system cool.

MARTINI: (335) Okay. So, you would bring a missile up and they would actually acquire it with the IFC?

PARSHALL: (336) Yeah, like they would fire it and they would be giving it the match and making sure that their equipment was fine.

MARTINI: (337) Okay.

PARSHALL: (337) It, the wings would go “flip, flip.” You would hear them or be standing next to them, watching the test. After they were finished you would unplug it. It was dangerous, plugging it in and dangerous unplugging it, but still, if you had done your test right, which is a test in itself, there should be no problem.

MARTINI: (342) What would like daily routine be aside from the drills like that? What did they have you doing?

PARSHALL: (343) I was generator operator and launcher crewman so my first duty was the generators, make sure they had, here, we had no public power, so we were on our own power, even the Admin area was our power, and we powered it all the way up to there. So, we would, there would be like two generators on at night, and we had three generators so we would be switching one of them off or two of them off and just running on a normal one generator. 250 horsepower creates a lot of electricity at 440 volts. So it would take care of this. The two or three were for extra safety in case one went out or something. Like again, they were brand new at that time, I mean, you know, they had only a few hours on them. (Laughs). So, that was our first step and then the second step was to come down here and do our daily shift, mainly checking for, they are always under hydraulics, so you test them under hydraulics. Hydraulics had a tendency to spring a few leaks. So, you are checking for oil on the ground, make sure everything is working. The doors, you would run the doors a few times, make sure they are not jamming. Make sure the elevator goes up and down and there is nothing underneath. Make sure the floor is as clean as it was when you took over and then checking the missiles out. Whatever the daily, these, at least, three times a month a new directive would come down and you would have a check and change a screw or torque to the screw or something like that.

MARTINI: (366) That is what I heard that these missiles were not just static, unchanged for years. They are always being tweaked and upgraded?

PARSHALL: (368) Right. And you had an engineer with you, generally, when you are doing that or the fellow, like Mr. Bohan, would be down helping you do it or doing it yourself and you would get it all ready and then he would come in and do it and that would be the end of it. Or replacing the part.

MARTINI: (372) If we wanted to make this place look as much as we could like it did when you were here, what changes would we do in this room?

PARSHALL: (374) Hmm. I don't believe the ceilings were painted, but that's. Well, we'd get the streamers. They make the missiles look a little better.

MARTINI: (377) Okay.

PARSHALL: (378) We'd connect all of the electricity to how it was so you could actually do your daily checks down here. Have the equipment sheets right here in the corner ready for checking. Everything else is pretty much ... you know what is throwing you off is the wear and tear in this building, but everything is just about how it was. It was very scary, to tell you the truth, to walk past these missiles, at that time, it was like, I don't know, something would break. (Laughs). You always feared it, but they were solid missiles, but you were always scared something was going to happen to the missile. You were overly protective of it.

MARTINI: (389) I understand that they, some of them had those big probes on the front that could impale you.

PARSHALL: (390) Well, not in, we never, probably at other sites, and at this site too, but when I was here the, those would have had probes on them and you would be going that way unless it, and they had the mailboxes on them anyway so ...

MARTINI: (394) Those were the plastic covers?

PARSHALL: (394) Yeah. Well, they had the round type and we had the old mail... and it looked like a mailbox. It had, slipped right over it. Just something to keep, the probes are very, like barbs, they, you just go near them and they'd cut you.

MARTINI: (398) Wow.

PARSHALL: (398) Not, they were dangerous.

MARTINI: (399) There is a lot of respect for the technology here.

PARSHALL: (400) Well, you were, A lot of pride, too. You heard of service pride or shining your shoes out of pride or whatever it is. You always, always were. The engineers were the only ones allowed to go without shiny shoes, and that was my duty because we dealt a lot with hydraulic fluids and but everybody else, you know, they were ready for parade at all times.

[FIRST TAPE - SIDE THREE]

Interviewer: John Martini, Curator of Military History, Golden Gate National Recreation Area

MARTINI: (001) Why didn't you stay in?

PARSHALL: (002) Well, I, before I got out, I had a child. I already had two children before I went in and I had another one in and the Army decided that I was, that when I was in the reserves they decided I should get out. (Laughs). They ran into, they had some trouble, you know, Kennedy, they had trouble in Germany, and then they had trouble in Cuba so, they were ready to step up ... This was after I got out of the Army. They were ready to step up my reserve unit, which was a medical unit, taught me how to kill with ease without a care in the world. It was unbelievable. So, they asked how many kids you had and everybody, all these young kids, you know, they had no kids and I stood up, and stood up there and finally they decided hey, they got me out within a month. That was a mistake, I should have stayed in that would have, the stuff that is still going on with these missiles is unbelievable and I liked to have been apart of it, but you don't make wise choices all the time. Maybe it was a wise choice. Who knows?

MARTINI: (014) When you were, were you married when you were here?

PARSHALL: (014) Mm Hmm.

MARTINI: (014) So, where was your wife living?

PARSHALL: (014) San Francisco. That's where, that is one of the main, it's that my children were here and everything was here. My family was here. I had nobody in New York. So, that is why I wanted to get back here.

MARTINI: (017) Did you have to stay in barracks or could you go home?

PARSHALL: (017) I stayed in barracks most of the time, but I could have gone home, too, but it was easier, during the week, to stay in the barracks. We practically had a couple of weekends off a month, not the full Saturday, Sunday, but half a day Saturday and Sunday be back in the morning Monday. It was much easier staying here during the week, the hours, I would be here until eight o'clock at night, and then you got to get up at five. So, if you try and go over, the bridge was not that bad at that time, but.

MARTINI: (023) So, how long were you actually there at Site 88?

PARSHALL: (023) Probably about eight months.

MARTINI: (024) About eight months.

PARSHALL: (024) Yeah.

MARTINI: (024) Okay. So, did you ever go on a high degree of real alert aside from that incident?

PARSHALL: (025) No. It's just a fifteen minute status. We never had to sleep with the missiles, no.

MARTINI: (027) Now I have heard that expression. What is that "to sleep with the missiles"? Is that your own?

PARSHALL: (027) Yeah, yeah, they actually locked themselves in down here so that nobody could get into them which didn't make any sense and the missiles have heaters in them so it was about 55 to 60 degrees down here at all times. They had little tiny heaters and so what the guys would do is just climb on top of the missiles and sleep on the missiles.

MARTINI: (031) I'll be darned.

PARSHALL: (031) And they would eat down here which didn't make a lot of sense. I don't think that carried on for maybe a day or so. That was their alert. They, I, and it was in the later part of the Vietnam War,

not the first part, when Kennedy had all these troubles in 1962 and it was towards the later part. I think it was mainly because of the attitude towards the Army, I think in the seventies, late sixties that they were getting bombarded with rocks and pedestrians were getting in here more and more. The Army couldn't shoot them at that time which they should have done, as far as I am concerned, but that's neither here nor there, it's my own opinion. This is a top secret thing so why let anybody in there, you know, that could sabotage it. This is our defense.

MARTINI: (041) You said that there was a real pride in duty, again at that time, when you were in?

PARSHALL: (042) Correct. Yeah. Yeah.

MARTINI: (042) Did you think that changed?

PARSHALL: (042) Oh. Definitely. Yeah. What other people have come by here and told me that you know they got the Snoopies [NB: cartoon drawings] in the generator building, and they got the [Confederate] battle flag in battery ... in launcher area B. That would never have been tolerated. I mean, somebody would have got, they would have spent a lot of time in Leavenworth doing that, to tell you the truth. That would be the truth. The officers had pride in the Army. They were people who were dedicated. For somebody else to do something like that, that was not the SOP of the day. You know, somebody has to pay. The officers always pulling inspections and like I told you before, the officers knew way more than we did. They knew everybody's job and they were highly qualified. Rombowski, who I talked about, was a graduate of West Point. I think we had a Captain as the CO, all with pride. You know so that it instills it into you. You are, although, I was twenty-five, twenty-six, I was still young, and these guys not any older than thirty, but they were still that, you know. So, pride of what of you did, pride of your job, pride of the Army, it was there. It was there. You wouldn't think of nothing. Having your hair cut or your shoes shined or when you left here and setting the example for others rather than getting into trouble. Because you only cause yourself more trouble but at the same time you had that pride that you were apart of this unit. You hear of the Infantry going into town, taking over town, fights and all of that kind of thing. That would have never happened with us, to tell you the truth, never.

MARTINI: (063) You did mention that you used to go into Sausalito and you get together with some of the other guys from other Batteries?

PARSHALL: (064) Here we had a bus. A twenty passenger bus, or something like that, and if you could get seven guys together, that had a pass, waiver, the way it, just a night pass, it was like a, just to go off base, you had to be able to call in or no matter what kind of pass you had. But they would allow us to go down to Sausalito to get a pizza and some, and a Coke, stand around a little bit and bring something back and it was, it was kind, that was like, exciting. You could go over to the Presidio, but I never did, for movies. We had no movies here.

MARTINI: (071) The theater was not operating?

PARSHALL: (071) No.

MARTINI: (071) Was the chapel?

PARSHALL: (071) The chapel. Yeah.

MARTINI: (072) Was that on the Visitors' Center site?

PARSHALL: (072) And that was not our Chapel, either. We had nothing to do with that part down there near the Visitors' Center, nothing.

MARTINI: (073) Oh.

PARSHALL: (073) No. There was a Reserve unit in the other part, and that was theirs. Our chapel was our Day Room.

MARTINI: (075) The chaplain came and held services?

PARSHALL: (075) Mm. Hmm. Yeah and another thing nice was, like, David met his wife, she was a part of the coffee people, you know, that would come over. Girls would come by and actually help you write letters, which was at that time very difficult to do because you had never wrote a letter before, say, and they would help you with that. They would bring coffee and doughnuts. They would dance. Always under supervisor, supervision.

MARTINI: (080) Were they USO?

PARSHALL: (081) I think they called them something else. They were not a USO company. They came very seldom. You went to the USO. I used the

USO a lot when I was in Washington going to school. If I could get a day pass, or a Saturday pass. You could go there. They had cots set up for you in case you could not make it back, coffee, doughnuts plus a theater tickets and baseball tickets and it was a great place the USO. No, this was a service run out of the Presidio.

MARTINI: (086) They came out, they actually came out to the site?

PARSHALL: (087) Yeah. Donna, Donna was part of that ...

MARTINI: (087) Right.

PARSHALL: (088)... and then David's wife later on was part of that same unit.

MARTINI: (089) For the record, Dave ...?

PARSHALL: (089) Oh oh. Oh boy, I can't ... Krot, David?

MARTINI: (090) Is it Kroits?

PARSHALL: (091) Kreutzinger

MARTINI: (091) Okay. Who was also here at the site?

PARSHALL: (092) His wife, Janet, and Donna Norris.

MARTINI: (092) Donna Norris.

PARSHALL: (093) Whose husband was a Sergeant at Site 87. A career man. In fact, an inventor of quite a bit of things for these missiles. How to check them better, ways to plug them in better. He really, he was a great man.

MARTINI: (096) Were there any real characters, I mean, oddball type characters?

PARSHALL: (097) When I went to school there was.

MARTINI: (097) Yeah?

PARSHALL: (097) In our groups, I mean, everybody, I guess, was fooling around there, but no characters here. No characters, yeah. Serious people. Lots of serious people. Very serious.

MARTINI: (100) Everybody tells their own jargon. These were the “pits”?

PARSHALL: (101) The pits, yeah.

MARTINI: (101) Okay. What were these called [NB: indicates the missiles]?

PARSHALL: (101) Birds. These were birds.

MARTINI: (101) Birds?

PARSHALL: (101) Yeah. We made them fly. (Laughs).

MARTINI: (102) What did you call the guys up on top of the hill, at the IFC?

PARSHALL: (102) Probably quite a few things. Those were the nerds, if you really want to know. I mean, they thought so much of themselves up there it was pitiful. Yeah. We were jealous, actually, of those up there after, you know, I had seen what they do and I was in New York I was part of that group that would go in the air conditioning trailers all day long. We are down here in the fog, you know, they're telling us what to do all the time and that's why there is resentment in it as so far, we are part of a team and we are a good team that way, I guess, we are all trying to show off each other, you know, better but there was a little resentment towards the IFC.

MARTINI: (111) Yeah. Even today you kind of pick up some of that.

PARSHALL: (111) [Laughs]. Well, it was there, you know, you had to leave a couple of things ...

PARSHALL: (112) Is that it?

MARTINI: (113) Well, let's do one thing.

PARSHALL: (113) Okay.

MARTINI: (113) What goes through your mind when you come back now?

PARSHALL: (115) Unfortunately, it has deteriorated. I wish the Army would have turned this thing over lock, stock and barrel like they had wanted to and it had been preserved a lot better than what it is. But, there is still a lot of pride we have been seeing all of these people coming out visiting and the questions they ask. The little kids especially ask the greatest questions and it is kind of nice.

MARTINI: (119) What do they ask?

PARSHALL: (119) Oh, they don't ask the technical questions they ask, "well how could you do that because it weighs so much?" or "how do you keep the air in there?", you know, and "if you have a warhead how do you keep it from going off?" you know, or "what do those dogs eat?" (Laughs) stuff like that.

MARTINI: (123) Hopefully not the guard.

PARSHALL: (124) "Well if it could fly that high, how could I can't see it?" Great questions.

MARTINI: (125) I watched you give a talk to a group of high school students one time and I think one of them asked a great question "Were you ever scared?"

PARSHALL: (127) Yeah. You could answer that question, yes. Yeah. It's just ... I kind of put it like when we went through basic and had to fire the rifle. You are looking down there a couple of hundred yards, you see the target and you pretend it is a man, and then you have got to pull the trigger. You do the same thing, here. You know you are actually going to kill someone. You fire this thing off and or get killed. So, the scariness wasn't for me, or this guy, it was more for the ... I always thought of San Francisco, you know. I wouldn't want that destroyed.

MARTINI: (134) So that was always real?

PARSHALL: (135) Yeah. Yeah. I feared a lot because I knew what these weapons could do and they were carrying the same thing with them so, it ... I don't think I was ever scared for myself, I was just nervous, real nervous.

PARSHALL: (138) Not knowing what to expect.

MARTINI: (138) Do you think the fact that you had family so nearby, you think that kicked it [nervousness] to an extra level?

PARSHALL: (139) Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, well, it could have. I felt the same way in Niagara Falls, though. The power plant and everything there. You don't want to lose the war before it starts, you know. I worried that way too. I wouldn't want this country under Communism no matter

what, and I would still fight to the death for it. I have a strong feeling of patriotism and I do. Everybody knows that. I would die for my country. I don't want to, but I would and it had to be that way. Yeah. It's ... well, you are strictly defense you are not offense. They come to you, so you don't feel so bad if, that you're gonna knock them down. In fact, you probably would have pleasure in saying, like, they did with the SCUD, when they knocked down the SCUD over there in Desert Storm, you know, there is a pride in doing it. Doing your job. I think the Army instills ... any service instills that in you ... if do you job properly, there is a lot of pride in it.

MARTINI: (153) The wrecker it caught my eye back there. I did want to ask you about the vehicles here ...

PARSHALL: (155) Oh, okay.

MARTINI: (155) ... and Battery Alexander is where you had your offices and your vehicles?

PARSHALL: (156) Correct. Mm Hmm.

MARTINI: (156) And you did your "trip tickets" in there, which were like log books and ...?

PARSHALL: (157) Trip tickets for each piece of machinery that you operated. They all had an hour meter on them.

MARTINI: (158) Okay.

PARSHALL: (158) And the generator. I had a card with all of the responsibilities on the back. I was tested and signed by Bohan that I was, like driving a car or driving a half inch (?), I had to go over to the Presidio, even though I had driven for ten years, I had to go over the Presidio and take a test in driving a car so I could drive the truck up and down that hill.

MARTINI: (163) And now, what specific vehicles were assigned to the site?

PARSHALL: (164) The ones that I know about are the bus.

MARTINI: (165) The bus was assigned to the site?

PARSHALL: (165) Yeah. Sure. It was our bus. It was parked over there [Btry. Alexander] all the time. You could see it from here. The bus, a

deuce-and-a-half [truck]. The cherry picker was our main vehicle down here, like a portable forklift, except it had the big boom on the end. They could lift, actually, when we, I told you about that missile, when we brought it up here, we brought it up on the cherry picker and it was going like this, it was teetering all the way up through there [NB: indicates launcher area gate] and then we had the boosters on the truck, put them on the rails, and then joined the two right there. But the cherry picker, it was strong enough to pick that whole missile up with a warhead in it, and teetered like this, but brought it all the way up there. It was a strong machine. I don't know any other missiles that, any other equipment. We did our own work on all those things I know that. We had no jeeps here.

MARTINI: (179) No jeeps?

PARSHALL: (179) No jeeps.

MARTINI: (180) Did they feed you good?

PARSHALL: (181) Very good. We had one of the best cooks I ever saw in my life for a big, you know, a lot of people. This was a small base, when I first stationed at Niagara Falls, you know, you would eat in cycles like at two and three, and rush through the line and never go back for seconds because there was no time. I first got here, a little room no bigger than this and tables, and I started going through the line I was ready to run and the guy says, "how do you like your steak?" and that's the truth. And I knew I was in heaven. (Chuckling) Like I told you, at night he would bring ... if you are on the fifteen minute warning and you were in that little shed up there ... he would bring coffee, doughnuts or cake that he had made during the day. So he took care of you, and he didn't have to do that because he was off duty about six o'clock. As soon as the mess hall was clean he could leave. He actually stayed later and did it. A devoted person. Nice guy, and I wish I could remember his name. I can't remember anybody's name. **[END TAPE]**