

Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project  
Roberts Memorial Library  
Middle Georgia College  
Interview with Martin Avsec

May 9, 2012

**Robards:** The date is May 9, 2012. My name is Paul Robards, Library Director at Roberts Memorial Library at Middle Georgia College. I will be speaking with Martin Avsec from Eastman Georgia today about his experiences in the Vietnam War.

**Robards:** What branch of the service did you serve in?

**Avsec:** I was in the U.S. Air Force.

**Robards:** Why did you join the military?

**Avsec:** I joined it, because I didn't want to get drafted.

**Robards:** How old were you when you joined the military?

**Avsec:** I joined in May of 1966, so I was nineteen.

**Robards:** Where did you go to receive basic training?

**Avsec:** Lackland Air Force Base.

**Robards:** Where did you attend advanced training and how long did it last?

**Avsec:** I first went to Sheppard Air Force Base for propellant technician and then, prior to going to Vietnam, I went to Stewart [AFB] I think it was, in Tennessee, where I went to get training on the Hamilton Standard propeller.

**Robards:** Did this training sufficiently prepare you for your duties in Vietnam?

**Avsec:** Yes it did.

**Robards:** What was your occupation code?

**Avsec:** 42151 A.

**Robards:** What dates did you serve in Southeast Asia?

**Avsec:** October 7<sup>th</sup> [1967] to Sept 28<sup>th</sup> [1968]. I got out a couple of days earlier than a year.

**Robards:** What are the names of the units your were assigned to?

**Avsec:** I was in the 459<sup>th</sup>, and the 537<sup>th</sup>. Ship troop, I guess it was. Well, we were in a [MAS] squadron, Military Airlift Squadron, so it was 459<sup>th</sup> and 537<sup>th</sup>. We were out of Phu Cat Air Base.

**Robards:** What was your rank during the war?

**Avsec:** E-4

**Robards:** Did you receive any awards or citations?

**Avsec:** Yeah, I received a commendation for service in Vietnam; a commendation medal.

**Robards:** Although you were not in a combat unit, were you ever attacked or close to any fighting?

**Avsec:** During the Tet Offensive, in March of 1968, (I think it was during the spring time), [they said] “hey, here’s your M16.” I had never used an M16; we practiced on it before we went to Vietnam, but I was strictly a mechanic, so I was kind of surprised that I was getting an M16.

**Robards:** Describe the bravest action you witnessed during the war.

**Avsec:** We were actually out of touch with the combat veterans. We went in to a lot of the Special Forces camps to provide them food, ammo, and we also took out bodies. I can’t remember any type of “bravest act.” I wasn’t privy to that type of situation.

**Robards:** As a young serviceman, what was your understanding about the reasons for the war?

**Avsec:** They always said it was to prevent communism from continuing on in the area.

**Robards:** How did this understanding of the situation affect how you did your job?

**Avsec:** It didn’t matter to me. I was just there to work on aircraft.

**Robards:** Describe your living conditions, housing and food in Vietnam.

**Avsec:** The housing we were in is what they called hooches. They were just buildings with sandbags around them, especially in Da Nang Airbase. When I first got in the country, I went to Cam Ranh Bay, and we lived in barracks there, and then they sent me to Phu Cat and I was in the barracks there, but then they sent me to Da Nang Airbase and there was a little bit of everything [accommodations]. The hooches were just like an area where you had small little shacks with sandbags around them and a little roof. There were definitely a lot of screened in areas. We got rained on a lot as the hurricane season came. They don’t call them hurricanes over there; they call them something else—monsoons. We got wet a couple of times.

**Robards:** What was your daily routine while in Vietnam?

**Avsec:** It varied. When I was working in the docks, that was just doing inspections on aircraft systems. That proved to be monotonous, so I told my sergeant that I was getting tired of doing that; so he assigned me to Da Nang Airbase. I was put on the night shift for a while, and we had to wear flak jackets. The biggest situation occurred when we were pulling a prop on a Caribou. It was around eleven o'clock at night; we took the prop to the prop shop and five minutes later three rounds hit exactly where we [had been]. They were probably zeroing in on our lights that we [used] to work.

**Robards:** Did you ever do anything just for the fun of it?

**Avsec:** Yeah. I would [sometimes] go with the aircraft and see what they did. They didn't mind me coming along, because I was a prop man. A lot of times I would go with the crews and go on missions with them. It was kind of neat. I mean, you are 19 years old and you think you are invulnerable and you do stupid things like that.

**Robards:** So you logged flight hours that you didn't get credit for? How many?

**Avsec:** Oh boy, I don't really know. Like I told you, I've got about 30 minutes of film, and I've got film of going on these missions. At one point we were doing an air drop on a Special Forces camp that was being attacked. And we have other film of how they actually get the product to the Special Forces camp. We had to go to Special Forces camps in case an aircraft was down—had engine problems, or something else. The prop man went with the engine man, so we were at some Special Forces camps for a couple of nights.

**Robards:** What kinds of illegal drugs did you see being used in Vietnam and under what conditions?

**Avsec:** I heard about drugs being used, but I never used any, so I just wouldn't know.

**Robards:** Please describe any USO show that you visited.

**Avsec:** There was a couple. The Bob Hope show. I've got a whole film of a Bob Hope show. There was another one. I can't remember her name, but she was one of the popular singers back in those days. It was a time to do something that would get our minds off the war.

**Robards:** Were you able to use a Service Club, and if so, what activities did you participate in?

**Avsec:** Yeah, we used the Service Club a lot. We just went there to associate and drink beer. It was just a place to go to get away from our normal habitat.

**Robards:** What music reminds you of your Vietnam experience?

**Avsec:** "We Gotta Get Out of This Place—If It's The Last Thing We Ever Do."

**Robards:** Could you tell me about the most memorable event that happened to you or your unit while serving in Vietnam?

**Avsec:** Yeah. It was May 25<sup>th</sup>; it was a time when the VC were going for servicemen. They were actually trying to bombard our living area in Phu Cat Airbase. When you hear a round hit, you know exactly what it was. I was laying down on my top bunk, and there was a small desk that was right beside my bed. As soon as I heard the round hit, I just rolled, not thinking about where I was going; so I missed that desk by about a half inch. That was the most memorable thing I remember.

**Robards:** Do you think that Vietnam vets were discriminated against when they returned to the United States after their tours in Vietnam?

**Avsec:** I didn't experience any of that, so I couldn't be a good judge of that at all.

**Robards:** How has the war most affected your life?

**Avsec:** Well, I was training as an aircraft technician, a prop technician in the Air Force, [so] after I got out of the Air Force, I went to school to get my aircraft technician's license, and also flight licenses, too. It is something that I actually still use here. I teach aircraft maintenance; I teach the kids about the props and things I used during the war.

**Robards:** Have your views about the war changed over the years? If so, how?

**Avsec:** I think that it is politicians that cause a lot of wars. We were drafted back in those days [Vietnam War] and we only had to do one year. I see kids today that are going to this war that are doing three and four tours. That is the biggest thing that I see that I don't agree with, but what can you do?

**Robards:** Is there anything else that you would like to share about your Vietnam War experience?

**Avsec:** I don't talk about it that much, and people don't really know I've been there.

**Robards:** Thank you for your service and for participating in this project.