

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLOTTE PITTMAN

An Oral History Conducted by Vanessa Concepcion and Cecilia Winchell

Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a grant from the City of Las Vegas Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial and funding from private individuals and foundations. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White
Director, Oral History Research Center
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PREFACE



“I wasn’t one of those that knew I wanted to fly since I was two years old; that wasn’t really in my mind. It was just something that developed over time.”

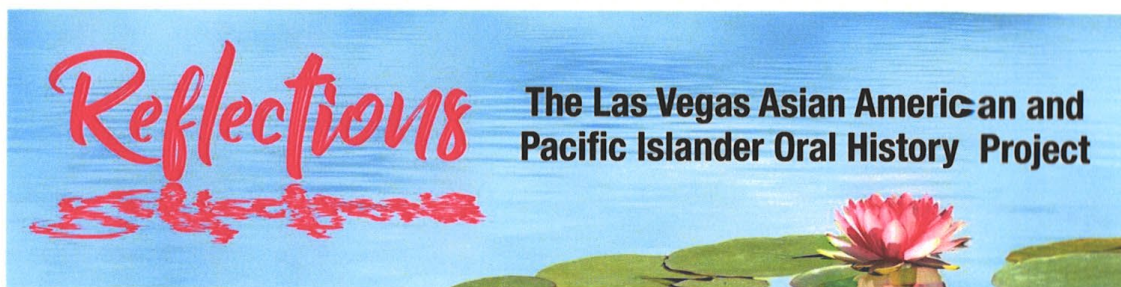
Having spent her childhood in places from the Philippines to Colorado, Charlotte Pittman hails from a strong military family that has traveled around and has proudly carried that into her own life. Her mother’s Hispanic heritage and her father’s Filipino heritage have created a robust blend of food, culture, and values that she now strives to pass down to her four children. Throughout this interview, Pittman touches on everything from her training to her life in Las Vegas, Nevada, showcasing all the different experiences being a pilot will lead to.

After attending the United States Air Force Academy for physics and math, Pittman pursued a pilot spot in the Air Force, leading eventually to a year and a half of flight training and almost two decades of service. First flying C-130s then later switching to remotely piloted aircraft, she discusses a variety of topics from her favorite mission to the intricacies of RPAs. With family at the forefront of her mind, Pittman sees a good balance between being able to fly RPAs with spending time with her sons. She finds life in Las Vegas to be convenient and diverse, reflecting her own unique blend of cultures.

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November 29, 2021
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Vanessa Concepcion

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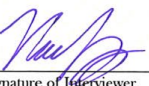
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Today is Monday, November 29, 2021. I'm here today with Charlotte Pittman, Cecilia Winchell, and Stefani Evans. This is Vanessa Concepcion.

Let's just start off by you spelling your first and last name for the record.

First name Charlotte, C-H-A-R-L-O-T-T-E; Pittman, P-I-T-T-M-A-N.

Could we start off by just talking a bit about your childhood, like where you grew up?

Maybe you could talk about your grandparents.

Sure. I was born in Long Beach, California. At the time, both of my parents were in the Navy, and so we only lived there less than a year after I was born. We moved to Hawaii after that. By then, my mom was out of the military; my dad was still in, and he was stationed at Camp Smith. We lived there until I was about six years old.

After that we moved to the Philippines. My dad is from the Philippines. He was born and raised there, and so he was happy to get an assignment back there. We lived in Olongapo City while my dad was stationed at Subic Bay for about two or three years. We were around tons of family. I had a lot of family up in the Manila area in Quezon City, so we would see them often. We actually lived off base as opposed to living on base like most families would out there just because my dad was very familiar with the area, so it was a different experience for my older brother and I. My brother Jonathan is two years older than me.

We were there when Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991, and so that's what drove our departure. My dad stayed there because he was still in the service. He stayed there with the cleanup effort. My mom, my brother and I, we were evacuated, so it was a series of bus rides, helicopter rides, and we rode on an aircraft carrier, the *USS Abraham Lincoln* to go from one island to another, to Guam, and then to California. Two of my cousins also traveled to the states with us. My mom had her hands full hauling four kids halfway across the world. We got airsick,

seasick, you name it—but we made it. Even with all the discomfort, my mom and I always reflect back on that trip fondly and find things to laugh about.



July 1991, on the USS Abraham Lincoln getting ready to board a helicopter

Finally, we went to Colorado, which is where my mom's family was. Since it was a short-notice departure we ended up in Colorado to live with family for a while. We moved in with my grandma, my mom's mom. Eventually we moved into our own house and my dad retired, but we stayed in Pueblo. I was there from fifth grade all the way through college in Colorado. After college, I started moving around on my own and ended up here in Las Vegas.

My brother was in the army for a while, then moved back to Pueblo where he and my mom still are today. I also have a younger sister, Charlene, who lives in San Diego. We didn't grow up together—she is ten years younger than me and was born and raised in the Philippines. She moved to California as a teenager and has lived there since. We met in 2016 and have gotten very close over the last few years.



Nov 2019, with Charlene next to MQ-9 at Nellis Airshow

As far as my grandparents, like I said, I lived with my maternal grandmother in Colorado for a couple years. My maternal grandfather passed away before my brother and I were born, so didn't really know much about him. My paternal grandmother, we spent a lot of time with while we were in the Philippines. But my paternal grandfather, same thing, he passed long before my brother and I were born. I really have no knowledge or memories of my grandfathers, but I did grow up around my grandmothers on both sides.

Could we go back a bit? Could you talk about your grandmother in the Philippines first and living there for the two years that you were there, if you even remember?

Yes. Even before we moved to the Philippines, I remember my grandmother Constancia, my *lola*; that's what they call her in Tagalog. I remember her visiting us in Hawaii quite a few times. She was the mother of seven children. My dad is the youngest of their very big family. They all

grew up in the Philippines. They grew up very poor, all nine of them living in a single-room house, and so they were really, really tight. My *lola* is the very respected matriarch of the family, and so everybody took care of her as she got older. My dad and her were really, really close. She visited us a lot, and we visited her a lot when we were in the Philippines. It was fun to be around her. Her house always had a ton of family, a ton of kids, just a lot going on. Too many cousins to remember their names, a lot of noise and chaos, but it was all family so it was fun.

After we left there, I don't think she ever visited us in Colorado, but my dad went back to the Philippines a lot, because as she got older and got sick, she couldn't travel anymore. After we left the Philippines, I don't think I saw her again before she passed away, and that would have been somewhere in the late '90s. She was 82 when she passed and my dad was there with her in the Philippines. I have a lot of fun memories of her, her cooking, or just little quirky things that *lolas* do. I remember when she was hot she would fan her shirt up and down, sometimes accidentally flashing whoever was around. When I was little and lounging around the house, she used to tell me to make sure to sit with my legs closed to be ladylike. And when she used to give us kisses on the cheek, it was more of a big sniff on our faces than an actual kiss.

You eventually made your way to Colorado, which you spent most of your time. What was it like living with your maternal grandmother and just living in Colorado?

It was a little bit of a culture shock to be honest because being in California, Hawaii, and the Philippines, it was all very warm, very tropical. I remember going to the beach or pool all the time, and rainy seasons and monsoons. Then we moved to Colorado where it was mountainous and dry, and that first winter was like nothing I had ever experienced before. I had never seen snow until I was eleven years old, and so it was beautiful, but I never got used to the cold.

In my mom's family, she is the oldest of five siblings, so she's from a big family as well. Their family wasn't as close as the Filipino side. She had a brother, and a sister, who also lived in Pueblo, and they each had one or two kids, and so we had some family there but it just wasn't on the same scale as on my dad's side. A lot of my memories of living with my grandma Magdalen, or Molly, are with her cooking and music. She used to play the piano and the guitar, and one of my uncles lived with her, and he also played the piano and the accordion. There was always a lot of music at the family get-togethers, and a lot of bonding around food. That's similar to both sides of the family, no surprise there, the Filipino and the Hispanic culture always have a lot of food around, especially for special occasions.

Another similarity on my mom's side is that she and her siblings looked out for their mom and took care of her. As she got older, she got dementia, and so everybody really leaned on each other to help with her care. She passed away two years ago, in October 2019. I went back to Colorado to visit, even, with my family about every year, every other year, so we were still close with that side up till now.

You mentioned this. On your mom's side is the Hispanic side, and then your dad's side is the Filipino side?

Yes.

Could you talk a little about those similarities?

Yes, there are a lot of similarities. Big families on both sides. A lot of big personalities. Very warm and inviting people, like lots of hugs, lots of people wanting to feed you. Whenever there is a family get-together, there's a lot of people around just because there's aunts, uncles, and cousins. On my mom and dad's side, many relatives tended to live close by each other. Even if

they moved away, they would sometimes move back in with their parent or grandparent, and so there is always a lot of family around one area.

Like I mentioned, the bonding and everything focuses a lot on food, especially on the Filipino side. I always laugh because instead of taking group pictures at get-togethers, there's always pictures of the food on the table, just as much or more so than the actual family photos, which always cracked me up. I think the food I grew up with is the main part I hold on to and try to bring into my family.

Unfortunately, I didn't take the language. I don't speak Tagalog. I don't speak Spanish. My dad obviously spoke Tagalog and pretty much all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins do too. My brother and I were a little bit more, I guess, Americanized than the rest of them just because we grew up here, and our cousins grew up in the Philippines before they moved here. So unfortunately, we weren't immersed in the language and culture in the same way. It's not an excuse—it's something I wish I appreciated more as a child and tried to learn. Same on my mom's side. My mom did not speak Spanish, so the language stopped at my grandma's generation, and most of her kids don't speak it either, at least not fluently, and so that was unfortunately lost on me, too.

Could you describe some of the foods that you mentioned for people that aren't familiar with Filipino food or Hispanic foods that you said?

Yes. On the Filipino side, whenever there is a get-together, which is birthday, birth, death, any reason, it's a big thing. There is always *pancit*, which is a noodle with vegetables and meat dish. My dad used to make chicken adobo a lot, which is a chicken marinated in vinegar and soy sauce. Lumpia, which is similar to a spring roll or egg roll (but better). A lot of rice with everything. Those are some of the staples that my dad and my aunts made all the time. Nobody

makes it like them, and I've tried to emulate it, and I've come, I don't know, this close, but mine just doesn't taste as good as theirs! There's sinigang, which is a fish dish. We used to eat a lot of tocino, lechon, siopao, longanisa, pandesal, turon, halo halo, and even balut. I didn't realize what balut was when I first had it. There were a lot of street vendors near our house in Olongapo City, and there was a guy on a bike who would sell balut on the street out of a box on the back of his bike. My dad bought it for me and my brother to try, and it was really good! We ate it a lot when we lived there, but as I got older and learned exactly what it was, it wasn't so appetizing anymore.

On my mom's side, I remember my grandmother used to make homemade tortillas. She used to make homemade green *chile*, and still to this day, I cannot find a green *chile* that matches my grandma's. I've tried to make my grandma's food, and again, it comes close, but nothing is like her's.

Back to Colorado, you ended up going to college there. What did you end up studying?

I went to the Air Force Academy, which was an hour away from where we lived in Pueblo, in Colorado Springs. My dad being in the military, he encouraged my brother and I to join the military as well. For me, he really pushed hard for me to get and maintain good grades, and since I did, instead of enlisting, he said, "If you're going to go and be in the military, you should go this route because you have the grades for it, and it will be better than the route I took." We looked at all the military academies, and I liked the Air Force Academy because at the time I had some aspirations of going to space. I think my parents liked it because it was only an hour from home. I ended up going to the Air Force Academy.



Pictured with family clockwise from top left: dad, uncle, brother, mother, Charlotte Pittman, and three aunts
2003, US Air Force Academy

I majored in physics, and I minored in math. I chose that because at the time I aspired to be an astronaut. I didn't have a real clear plan of what I wanted to do, but it was just something like, this sounds cool; you learn about physics, learn about astronomy, and see where this goes.

Those plans changed sophomore year. We all had an opportunity to do a summer research program, which is like an internship, almost, for three months, and it's in line with your major. I went to this research and development base in the middle of nowhere Tennessee. It was at Arnold Air Force Base in Tullahoma, Tennessee, which I had never heard of. I went there and I was linked up with a physicist who was doing research, and I hated it. A lot of the research he was doing was fascinating, but I felt like it was over my head. Just the whole scene and

everything, I thought, this is not really something that I think I want to do as far as a career going into the research field.

I kept my major, but I rethought my career path. Originally, I thought maybe my path into space would be something along the engineering or research route, but after that summer experience, that changed. And then I started looking at other options. Well, maybe I could be a pilot. I never thought that was something that I could do because it just seemed very difficult and unattainable, for whatever reason. But after that summer research experience, I seriously thought about it. Also, the thing about the academy is...if you're qualified and you want to be a pilot, you have a really good chance of getting a pilot spot through the Air Force Academy. So I took that opportunity, and for a while still in the back of my mind had the thought of maybe being an astronaut, but it didn't quite end up that way. That path is an extremely rigorous and competitive and just ridiculously challenging one that was just not in the cards for me, which is okay. As I went through my training, there were certain things I realized I was good at and certain things I realized I was not so good at. I found other experiences flying several different aircraft that have been great.

Could you speak about those experiences? What goes into the training for that? It sounds very intensive.

Yes, there is a lot. When I graduated from the academy, we all basically put a wish list of jobs and what AFSC, or Air Force Specialty Code, you get is based on your class rank and what's available. The Air Force needs to have so many pilots; they need to have so many finance officers; so many researchers, etc. Depending on what your preference is, your grades and performance over the past four years, that all goes into what you're assigned. I got a pilot slot. All in all, it was probably about a year and a half of flight training to get my wings. The first

course I did was Introductory Flight Training, which was about six months, learning the basics in a small plane, like a Cessna. I flew a Diamond, DA20 Katana at the Academy right after graduation. It's basically just you and an instructor. It's a very small two-seat plane. You learn how to take off, how to land, about airspace and weather and how to talk on the radio...just the very, very basics of flying.

Then I went to UPT, undergraduate pilot training, and there are a handful of those bases around the country. I went to Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas. UPT is split up into two phases. The first phase everyone goes through together. T-37 Tweets and T-6 Texans were the two aircraft models that they used. I flew the T-6, which was the newer plane. This first phase was about six months long. You build on those IFT basics, learning how to use your instruments, do more advanced flight maneuvers, and then you do a little bit of different mission sets to see where your strengths and weaknesses are.

We did a little bit of aerobatics. They teach you to do loops, Split, barrel rolls, and a bunch of other maneuvers, which was the most fun, fun thing. You go out there with an instructor first. They teach you the maneuvers. Then the highlight is your solo, or when you get to take the plane out on your own without an instructor. You get a couple of different solos. You get a solo for takeoff and landing, and you get a solo to go out to the area to just practice those aerobatics. It's kind of a time to both scare the crap out of yourself and build your confidence because you're by yourself doing these maneuvers. You're relying on your training, but you don't have an instructor to bail you out if you make a mistake. It's super fun but, at the same time, it's one of those things where it's like, oh my gosh, I really scared myself right there, but it's okay, I figured it out and got home safely.

We also did a little bit of formation flying, or flying close range right next to one other aircraft, which was difficult. That was one of those things that was not my strong suit. But they assess how you're doing to determine what kind of aircraft to vector you to after this phase of training. Then we also practiced refueling where instead of flying wingtip to wingtip, you would practice flying right up under another aircraft, kind of simulating refueling. Again, you get graded on all these parts to see what skills you're good at.

Based on your performance, at the graduation of that first half, you go into one of two tracks. You could go into a fighter track and learn to fly fighter aircraft or a heavy track where you would learn to fly cargo aircraft or refueling aircraft. I wasn't so good at the formation flying, which is really what you need for fighters, so I went into the heavy track where you focus on those skills needed to fly the bigger aircraft.



Feb. 2005, dad pinning on pilot wings at UPT graduation

Then at the end of this second phase, which is about another six months, you get assigned an aircraft. Again, we get to put in our preferences or wish list. The instructors assess, and based on your skills and your performance, they assign you to an aircraft. I was assigned C-130s out of UPT and went onto Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas for my next phase of training.

What was the most standout experience during that training? You mentioned being scared.

How did you even continue?

I think the solos, so doing the takeoffs and landings and doing the aerobatics alone, was really the highlight. It was fun, but it was also really challenging. Like I said, being a pilot was never something that I...I wasn't one of those that knew I wanted to fly since I was two years old; that wasn't really in my mind. It was just something that developed over time. That year of training was probably one of the most difficult, for sure, but also the most rewarding, and I really got to know myself and my limits going through it.

Fortunately, there were two other females in my UPT class, so we all helped each other through that year because it was difficult in a lot of ways. There was definitely an element that was a little bit more challenging being in a very minority group. There were not a whole lot of females in training or in the field of flying just in general. I had some good people around me, with friends and family and my classmates. We helped each other through tough times.

I know you were also top ten percent in your class; is that right?

Yes. I was, out of Little Rock, which is the schoolhouse for C-130s. Once I was assigned C-130s, there was more training. Everybody who is going to fly a C-130, you go to Little Rock Air Force Base and learn how to do it. That's another six-month training course. That's where I graduated DG. They call it Distinguished Graduate if you're in the top ten percent of your class based on your academic tests and your flying performance, so that's where I did well. From there, I went

to Pope Air Force Base in Fayetteville, North Carolina as my first operational assignment in the Air Force.

How did that first assignment go?

It was good but shorter than I expected. Actually, I met my husband Carlos in Little Rock. He is from Arkansas, and I met him while I was in training there. We got engaged after three months and married after nine months of knowing each other, and here we are about sixteen years later, still going strong. He moved to North Carolina shortly before we got married. We really enjoyed North Carolina. We lived in Fayetteville, which was right outside of the base. Pope Air Force Base is right next to Fort Bragg, which is one of the biggest Army bases in the country.

I did a couple of deployments. Going into C-130s, I knew that their deployment schedule was, after you're fully trained, basically home for four months and deployed for four months. I deployed just a couple of months after we got married, which was difficult because we had only known each other for about a year, and we had just gotten married, and then I was gone for a few months, and he was there in a new town. It was a lot of adjustments, challenging, but we got through it.

As for the flying, I enjoyed it. We did a lot of low-level flying, so flying just a few hundred feet off the ground. We did training doing airdrops where you would fly low and open the back and drop cargo, or we would also do training with the Army where we'd load up a bunch of Army paratroopers in the back, and then fly somewhere, and they would jump out the side or jump out the back of the airplane. Those missions were always cool. When we deployed, this was during Operation Iraqi Freedom, so I deployed to Kuwait, and we were stationed at Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait, and we flew missions in and out of Iraq, basically taking troops and equipment in and out of theater.

It was difficult to be away, but I met a lot of people. The crew that I deployed with, we got tight. There were also other pilots and soldiers from all the different NATO countries there, so there were a lot of interesting people that we met and experiences we got to do. On some missions, we flew over the Tigris and the Euphrates River. We had one flight into Egypt and got to fly over the pyramids. Just seeing a whole different world was an awesome experience.



May 2007, pyramid flyover

Was it difficult traveling so often and being away from your husband and your family?

It was. I would say compared to most people in the military, I did not travel or deploy as much as a lot of people did. Part of that was by choice. Early on in our relationship when it was just us, I would volunteer for these trips to get experience. But as we had kids, I would volunteer for those things less and less.



Oct 2010, with first son and C-130 at El Paso Airshow

I was flying C-130s at Pope until late 2007, early 2008, and that's the point where I switched to RPAs, or remotely piloted aircraft. In those years, they were really trying to build up the remotely piloted aircraft operations, and so they were looking for volunteers, as well as requiring a lot of pilots to move from their aircraft into RPAs. I was a volunteer, thinking, I would go fly this for a few years and then come back to C-130s. I really wasn't ready to leave C-130s for good, and I thought I would find my way back, but that never happened because the RPA demand was so great. Once you were in, it was difficult to leave because the demand for that kind of support in theater was great.

In 2008, I switched over to flying RPAs, and part of the reason was—we didn't have any kids yet—but part of the reason for making that move was, on the personal side, I knew that the deployment rate would be less because you're flying it from home station, remotely, and so you can be at home more. The other side of it was because it was an emerging technology and, just thinking of long-term planning, going into something that was new and developing was appealing. I first flew the MQ-1 Predator, then the MQ-9 Reaper since 2010.

You mentioned you were one of the few women in your training. Were there other Asian American or Pacific Islander women that you saw, too, or was it very little?

It was very little. I am trying to think...of the women that were there, I honestly can't recall another Asian or Pacific Islander. There might have been another one because there were a lot of different classes going on at the same time. But in the people that I was around, honestly, I can't think of one. I can think of maybe one African American female that was there around the same time. As for the males, there were probably a couple Asian or Pacific Islanders there, two or three, but in the minority.

Now I just want to know what led you to Vegas. Because you've been around Colorado, California, North Carolina. What led to Vegas?

Las Vegas and Creech Air Force Base, in particular, is the hub of RPA operations. When I volunteered to fly RPAs, I came here for training and my first assignment. When my husband and I moved here, compared to everywhere else we had lived and visited, we really liked Las Vegas. We liked the climate. We liked the city.



March 2008, MQ-1 training, Creech Air Force Base

We stayed here for two years during that assignment, and I was still on active duty at the time. In 2010, we were transferred down to New Mexico, which is another RPA base at Holloman Air Force Base, and we were there for a few years. If there is a city that is the opposite of Las Vegas, Alamogordo would probably be it. It's a very small town. There's not a lot there. This is a twenty-four-seven city; that's like a nine-to-five small town, so just that contrast was a difficult adjustment. But we're not small-town people, and so we really didn't like it there very much. But the work I was doing was rewarding. The unit I was with I really enjoyed. It had a training mission, so while we were there I got to teach other pilots how to fly RPAs, but when we saw an opportunity to come back to Las Vegas, we jumped on it.

While we were in New Mexico, I applied to the Reserves and looked for a job back in Las Vegas. We came back here in 2013 and have been here ever since.

From what you remember when you lived in Vegas for the training and stuff, what did Vegas look like, and what were your impressions of Vegas?

When we first lived here back in 2008 to 2010, we always say we liked the convenience of the city. There was always something to do any time of the day or night whether you need to get groceries at one in the morning, you can do that, or if you wanted to have a quiet night at home. We lived up in the northwest, and so the neighborhood was quiet. If we wanted to go to a concert or do some kind of big deal downtown, Vegas pretty much had everything, so we had options, which we really liked.

That first year we lived here, we were very confused because we didn't see a cloud that entire year. It was weird, but it was notable to us because it was just so different because we had both lived in some very humid places. That and getting through our first winter here was different. I think that first winter here we got maybe a half-inch of snow one day, and everything shut down. But we really liked the mild winter. Climate, things to do, and how diverse the city is have all been great.

There are different pockets all around town of different groups of people, different things, different cultures, which we also really enjoyed because some other places we've lived were much more, I guess, homogenous, which is fine, but we like the different cultures and having all of it nearby.

Since 2010, you've lived here ever since, what has changed over time?

We've seen a lot of growth. We visited here in 2006, then we moved here in 2008 through 2010, and then we came back in 2013. The first time we lived here, we lived near Ann and Decatur. At

that time, I think Durango was as far as the city went. The Hualapai exit existed, but beyond that it was just dirt. There was nothing out there. Then when we came back in 2013, there was a new neighborhood right there off the Hualapai exit, which is where we moved. Since then, it's just expanded even more. When we first moved back here in 2013, once you came out of our neighborhood, you had this nice clear view of the whole Strip. You can kind of see the whole city because we're a little bit elevated up there. But now, you come out, and it's Albertsons and Taco Bell and just a bunch of houses. You can't really see as much as you could before. Just the amount of growth has been fast and widespread since we first moved here.

Could you speak a little bit about the community activities that you listed here? Your children eventually went to school here, right, too?

Yes. Our kids went to...we have four boys. We had one of them the first time we lived here in 2009. We had two boys while we lived in New Mexico. Then when we moved back here, we had our fourth baby in 2015. All of them went to elementary school near our house at Bozarth. My husband and I try to be as involved as we can in their school activities. To be honest, I would like to do more, but between work and just having four kids—I know it's a poor excuse—it's difficult to find the time. But we do get involved where we can. Whether it's a school club, spots like basketball and soccer, swimming lessons, or anything, we're always there to support them and give our time or whatever is needed to support the activity as well. For Nevada Reading Week, I always volunteer to go to the school and be a guest reader. I go in my uniform and it's fun to participate in just some small things like that. Over the past year or two, the activities have been a little bit lessened because of COVID, but as they're picking back up, we're just looking for more ways to get involved in their schools and things they like to do.



March 2020, with husband, Carlos, and their children at Nellis Air Force Base

On that topic, how did the COVID pandemic affect your career and your family?

Fortunately, the military keeps moving, and so my employment wasn't really affected. The way I went to work did. At first, we shifted to teleworking, but we still had to keep flying. We still had to keep doing these RPA missions, they had to reconfigure the schedule to make more restrictive shifts to lesson potential COVID spread. There were just a lot more restrictions and scheduling that were put in place to mitigate exposure and us being around in big groups. I still went to work

after that was figured out. If I wasn't actively flying, then I was teleworking, and so work continued. I was grateful to be able to continue that.

My husband, once we moved back here and had two or three kids at the time, stopped working to be a full-time dad, and so the pandemic didn't change his work schedule per se. The kids, they were full distance learning for that whole year. I would say as far as things go, as challenging as it was, I know that my family had it pretty good as far as my job being stable, my husband and I both being able to be at home to manage the distance learning for our kids. It all worked out okay. I think just like any other family that was forced into that homelife, all together all the time, we had ups and downs, but I think we came out stronger at the end of it, for sure.

On that topic of the pandemic, there was also a rise in anti-Asian violence. I just want to know your thoughts and opinions on that, or if that has ever affected you or your family.

We didn't have any direct experiences with that, but it was something that we paid attention to and considered if we were traveling or going out, even downtown. We limited some things we were doing, some of it due to COVID, some of it due to a lot of the societal issues that were going on, just for our kids' safety and our own safety. Fortunately, we didn't personally experience it, but, unfortunately, it absolutely happened and was terrible.

My best friend who lives here and takes care of her mom is Thai. Her mom is a little old grandma. She was afraid to take her to her doctor's visits or to the grocery store and things like that because a lot of the issues were targeting elderly people. We talked a lot about things happening around the country and gave each other support. It was just very heartbreaking and frustrating to see those kinds of issues arise and how it affected people.

On that topic, too, in your life, have you ever been discriminated against for being Asian or mixed race?

I would say yes, but I probably didn't recognize it as I was going through it. My parents didn't really highlight those sorts of things to my brother and me. My dad is a dark-skinned Filipino man, so he experienced a lot of racism in his job and just in his moving here to the United States. He has been turned away from hotels, denied jobs, denied promotions, or given jobs that were lesser than his rank just because he was the Brown guy. Unfortunately, my parents didn't share those stories with me until I was much older. Growing up, I think they tried to shield my brother and I from it, and so I wasn't very aware of issues about race or racism growing up. I say that I probably experienced it, but just didn't recognize it because I was always taught to give people the benefit of the doubt and have this positive, rosy outlook on life, and only as I got older did I realize it's not really that way, and I learned these things that my parents experienced. When I look back on certain events in my life that seemed off, or just didn't make sense, I wonder if there was discrimination happening that I just didn't think about. It's hard to say. One thing I do view differently now as an adult are the "where are you from" or "what are you" questions. Where before I would automatically smile and say Filipino, because I knew that's what they were getting at, now I just smile and say that I'm an American from California and ask the same question in return. I'm now asking the question, why didn't we have these conversations so that I was aware of it? And in turn, my husband and I talk to our kids a lot about the realities of society and how to navigate it as best as we know how.

Something I did recognize, especially going through training and school and being in military and aviation, is sexism was there. I experienced that and recognized that. But as far as racism based on my heritage, I didn't recognize it if it was there, too.

I want to turn it over to Stefani or Cecilia if they had any questions.

CW: I had a couple of questions. I was curious. You lived in a lot of places as a kid. What was the favorite place you lived, and why?

The favorite place I lived was the Philippines just because I loved the climate, the rain, and the beaches. Also, we had so much family there, and it seemed like we were always doing something. There was always something going on. Also, just the memories I have of living off base, in another country, they're not like anything I've experienced anywhere else. Living across from little street stores and street vendors, riding tricycles and Jeepneys through busy streets and down the street. There was a rice field with caribou pulling wagons across it and things like that. Also, during monsoon season, I remember rains heavy enough that my mom would literally take a bottle of shampoo outside and let us run around and shampoo our hair and let us run around in the rain again. I have very fond memories of living in the Philippines because of all those experiences and just being around family. Some of the nostalgia might have to do with my age, being seven, eight, nine years old then, so everything was fun and new at that time.

CW: Do you still carry on any cultural celebrations from your Filipino side?

It's limited as far as carrying out the cultural celebrations. It's more about education from my husband and I on both our sides. My husband is Black and Native American, and while we don't really carry out specific celebrations, we do talk to our kids a lot about our parents, their grandparents, where they were from, things they've been through, things that we've experienced, and just try to inform them about their background and heritage. It's sometimes a learning experience for me too, I'm always learning new things about my husband's heritage and my own alongside our kids.

CW: How strongly connected do you feel to your Asian American identity?

I wouldn't call the connection strong. Like I mentioned, I feel like my brother and I are very much American. We were born and raised here. We have a lot of the cultural habits and norms of a typical American. There are just pieces of the culture that I've brought into my life through food and stories and just trying to educate my kids a little bit better than I was about, our background and our heritage, so that they know where they came from. Some of the experiences that my dad had in the service and just in life, and my mom as well, they didn't share those with me until much later in life for whatever reason. I want to share more with my kids while they're young and as they get older as well.

But to answer your question, I don't feel a very strong connection. I am trying to learn more along with my kids to develop a stronger connection to that part of my heritage.

CW: Do you know why your parents, especially your dad was in the military and what he did?

Yes, for both of them. My mom was born and raised in Pueblo, which is a smallish town, and so she wanted to join the Navy just to get out of there and get some life experience. For my dad, he came over here as a teenager. He was naturalized to become a U.S. citizen and joined the military. He did have a pretty strong sense of patriotism and appreciation for this country, so I think he wanted to serve and give back to the country that way. His dad was in the military in the Philippines, and so I think he had a little bit of that heritage in him, and that was engrained as well.

SE: What branch of the military was your dad in?

He was in the Navy. Both of my parents were in the Navy.



Pittman's father, mother, and brother in uniform

SE: That's right. They were both in the Navy.

Yes. My mom separated when she had my brother and I. She served about seven years total. My dad served a total of twenty-two years. He retired at the rank of E-8, so a senior master sergeant. Or, sorry, a Senior Chief Petty Officer. I'm mixing up my Air Force and Navy ranks. Senior chief. They both worked in the medical field in the Navy—that's how they met. My dad was a hospital corpsman. He was basically a medic. A lot of the times he was stationed with, deployed with, worked with Marines who were on the frontlines, and he was their medic. He saw a lot of conflict and had a lot of stories that he didn't really share. Now that he's gone I rely on my mom's memories and any of his Navy memorabilia like medals, citations, and articles to learn about his service.

SE: Did he have an adjustment issue when he retired to civilian life?

Yes. Yes, when my brother and I were growing up, he was gone a lot. He was deployed. He was always working. When he retired, I don't think he liked to stay in one place. He still traveled a lot. Some of it was for family in the Philippines, and so he would travel back there often to take care of his mom or to help family. To visit his brothers, things like that. But it still seemed like he was always on the go. I think partly he was used to that kind of lifestyle that even after retirement, he didn't settle down. He was still traveling quite a bit and all over the place, finding ways to help and things to do.

SE: Are your parents still living?

My mother is. My dad is deceased. He passed away in 2009.

SE: Where was that?

He was in the Philippines at the time and planning a trip to Las Vegas for the birth of my first child, his first grandchild. Sadly he passed just a few months before my son was born.

SE: And your mom, is she in Pueblo?

She is in Pueblo, yes. Once we moved back there in 1991, she's been there ever since. My brother, after he left the Army, he moved back to Pueblo as well, so he is living there with my mom and his wife and two kids.

SE: Did your brother stay in the Army as a career?

No. He served about nine years, and then he separated.

SE: You're the one that followed your dad into the military and made it your career like he did and like his father did.

Yes, yes. I am eighteen years in now, and so I plan to continue till I hit twenty years and retire, and beyond that I'm still trying to figure it out.

SE: Tell us how it feels physically to fly remotely?

Compared to traditional flying, when you're up in the air in the aircraft, flying remotely is an adjustment because you don't have all those physical cues. When you're riding in a plane, you can feel it climbing, or you can feel when you're slowing down to land, things like that. You don't feel any of that, obviously, sitting at a computer with a keyboard. There's an adjustment to rely on the instruments a lot more. With remotely piloted aircraft, you screens here where you can input commands and see warnings, you have maps, and then you have your HUD, your heads-up display that shows you what you're looking at out in front of the aircraft. Then you more two screens around you, which have different tools and programs you can use for planning, for doing calculations and timing and things like that. It's a little bit of a visual overload. It's just a matter of prioritizing what you need to look at and knowing the systems, knowing the numbers, and the settings because you can't feel or hear anything like you would in a traditional type aircraft.



Kids flying RPA simulator

SE: I guess that's why I asked that question because you're losing that...

You lose a lot of your perspective, yes. Also, in an aircraft, you could just turn your head and see all around you. In this one, we have a nose camera, which just shows you a soda straw view, right in front of you. But these aircraft are also equipped with an additional camera that's controlled by the sensor operator who sits next to you, and so they can point this camera pretty much anywhere on the ground and it moves independently of the aircraft. You could be flying this way but looking over here. It gives you that looking around capability, but it can be a little bit disorienting because it's just displayed on the monitor in front of you.

SE: You still have a copilot in a sense, right?

In a sense, yes. They're called a sensor operator. The pilot sits in the left seat, the sensor operator in the right seat. As the pilot, I am responsible for flying the aircraft, keeping it in the appropriate airspace, altitude, talking on the radios, all that sort of thing. The sensor operator on the right side, they control the camera and some of the other equipment, they control where we're looking, and they also provide inputs about where we're going and provide safety checks and things like that. It's a different role than a copilot.

SE: I'm curious, but I don't want to ask any security questions. Where do the aircraft live, the physical aircraft?

It depends. Here at Creech, there are some aircraft there because Creech is a training base. The aircraft take off, they fly around the Nellis range for training, and then they land back there at Creech. For those aircraft that are doing real-world combat missions, it just depends on where those missions are.

SE: When you were flying the C-130s, tell us what that was like.

It was challenging. It's not the biggest cargo aircraft we have, but it's a big plane. A lot of the training we did was takeoffs and landings, and we did them on night vision goggles, we did them on shortened runways or unprepared runways because the C-130 is designed to get in and out of austere locations, or places that aren't very developed. It could be a dirt strip as opposed to a paved runway. We practiced airdrops, trooper drops, and low-levels and things like that because, again, that aircraft is designed to get in, get out of places that are hard to get to. Whereas a C-17 or a C-5, which are some of those other big aircraft, they would need a longer runway and need some different conditions to get in and out of a place, the C-130 is a little bit more agile. It can fly lower, land, and take off on shorter unpaved runways if necessary. Training to all that was difficult just because you must be precise in what you're doing to make sure that everything is safe.

SE: It seems to me that you stepped out of the traditional female role in both cultures that you were raised in. How did that work with your family?

When you say my family, you're talking about my mom and my dad, or my husband and kids?

SE: Your extended family.

With my extended family, the response has been pretty much all positive. Everyone is proud of what I've done, and from all accounts, they like to talk about me and think what I do is cool. I am very humbled and appreciative of it because it's been nothing but supportive.

SE: The two other women that were in your class, did they also go into the heavy track?

They did. One of them flew KC-135s, which is a refueling aircraft, and the other one flew C-17s, which is another cargo aircraft, larger than the one I flew. I'm still very close with them. That year we really bonded because we got each other through the best and the worst of everything, so

I am still very close with them. One is in California; one is in Mississippi, and we talk often and try to get together as much as we can. Yes, made some good friends through that experience.



With Denis and Mary at UPT and throughout the yearsWith Denis and Mary at UPT and throughout the years

SE: And they're still in the military as well?

They are. They are both in the Air Force. One is also in Reserve, and one is in the Guard. One of them, she is on the same timeline as me; we both have about two years left to retirement, and the other one has a few more years, but we're all on track to make it a career.

SE: Nice. Is there a favorite mission that you've flown that you can talk about?

Yes. The favorite mission I flew, it was while I was flying C-130s, and it was what's called a swap-out mission. While we're deployed, there's obviously a fleet of C-130s in theater that are doing missions every day. The C-130 is already an old aircraft, and so after a few months of being out there, it would need to come back home to get serviced. When that happens, they need

a crew to fly a fresh C-130 from the U.S. out to country, drop it off, and fly the old C-130 back home. I got to do one of those missions, and that was probably the most fun. We went from North Carolina up to Canada, St. John's, which is the furthest east point there. We spent the night there, so I got to hang out in Canada for a night. We flew across the Atlantic Ocean, which was another one of those cool but scary experiences. We landed in Ireland, so I got to stay there for a day. On our way in and out, we stopped in Ramstein, Germany; Souda Bay in Greece; we visited Turkey, and we stopped in Jordan, so we saw a lot of different countries. That was probably the coolest trip just because of all the different places we got to visit. It was a great experience.

SE: Was it the same route on the way back?

It was a little bit different. Altogether, those were the stops coming and going, but it wasn't exactly the same going and coming back.

SE: Where is Creech Air Force Base in relation to Las Vegas and Nellis?

It's about thirty minutes north of Las Vegas. You just go up the 95. It's co-located with Indian Springs.

SE: Is Indian Springs a military town?

Not really. Not really in the sense that the military members don't live in Indian Springs. They pretty much all live here in Vegas. While we're there, I may visit the gas station or restaurant occasionally, but Las Vegas is more of the military town than I would consider Indian Springs to be.

SE: Are most of the people that live in Las Vegas that are stationed in Creech, do they live in the north part of Las Vegas?

Many of us do, yes, up in that northwest area just because it's an easy drive, but there are some people that live in the southwest, some that live in Aliante, and there's even some that live in Henderson. Don't ask me why they would want to do that commute every day. The majority live in the northwest, but I know people that live all over the city.

SE: Is there a shuttle like there used to be to the test site?

I think there's a shuttle that goes from Nellis to Creech because there's no dorms or base housing at Creech and so there's a way for people to get from one base to the other if needed. A lot of people also carpool or vanpool because most live in the same neighborhoods.

SE: As a kid of a military family, you lived in different places. How did you cope with having to meet new friends at every place along the way?

I was a very shy kid, so I don't think I was the best at making friends. I was very, very reserved. I remember just not talking much in school pretty much until high school. College was when I really came out of my shell, almost by necessity. But moving from place to place, since we did it basically our whole lives, I was just used to it. Something I noticed as I got older that I feel like I missed out on, is people would have gone from kindergarten through the rest of school together and known each other their whole lives, and I never had a childhood friend like that. I felt a little bit of an outsider, and so I kind of kept to myself. Wherever we were I would typically make one or two friends, and those would be my close buddies, but I wasn't very outgoing throughout my childhood. I was painfully shy and reserved growing up.

SE: And you're the one that joined the military and became a pilot.

Yes, it's a strange path. Yes, it still even surprises me sometimes when I think about it because when I think about it, I just did one thing at a time and got to finish one step and got to the next

and continued it that way. But when I stop, from the outside looking in, it's like, my personality doesn't really fit; I'm still not quite sure how I got here, but here we are.



April 2006, Pittman and her children with MQ-9

VC: Before we close, I wanted to ask, because you said you were going to retire in two years, what do you want to do once you retire?

When people ask me that, I say kind of jokingly, as little as possible. I really want to be as involved as I can with my kids. Like I said, growing up, I remember my dad being gone a lot of the time because of military service, and so that was a big reason why I volunteered for this RPA job, to be present and give my kids a little bit more stable family life, and they've had that so far. They know Vegas, and that's pretty much all they know, and they've gone to the same school from kindergarten on. I've done my best to be involved in their school and be there for all the events, but there are things that I've missed just by nature of the job, working weird hours and

weekends and things like that. I want to be there for them full-time. We also want to do a lot more traveling to see and experience the world.

I know realistically I'm probably going to have to figure out work to do. My husband and I are throwing around some ideas. He really wants to go back into the workforce as well, so we might do a little bit of a role swap when retirement around. That's the plan right now. He has loved being able to spend all his time with the kids, but he also loves to work. The next couple of years, hopefully we can make that transition and swap roles.

VC: Do you want your kids to step into the military, too, or not really?

Not necessarily. I stepped into it because it was presented as a path to success based on my dad's experiences, which I appreciate, and it has allowed me a certain amount of success and to be able to take care of my family. When I entered the military, it was a different climate. We weren't in a twenty-year conflict. The world is a very different place now than it was then, and so I am not going to push my kids into the military or present it as, "This is what you should do," the same way it was presented to me. But if it's something that they're interested in, I will give them all the advice and information I can so that they can make an informed decision on their own.

VC: Lastly, is there anything that we didn't get to discuss that you wanted to mention?

You're putting me on the spot. Let me think. I can't think of anything.

VC: Could you tell us why it's important to collect stories such as yours?

Yes, absolutely. I think history is extremely important. And collecting oral histories is a great way to preserve history. I think as people, we are fundamentally the same—we want basically the same things and face the same challenges. Just very generally speaking, learning about an individual's history can be relatable or something to take lessons or inspiration from. I also think the saying "if you don't know history, you're doomed to repeat it," is true. You look at things

that are going on in the world today, and you can draw direct parallels to events and things that happened thirty years, forty, fifty, a hundred years ago on things that were very similar and take lessons from that. But not being aware of that history, you are kind of fumbling around, trying to figure things out. Like I mentioned, my husband and I along with our kids are learning our own histories and learning our own heritage and diving into our ancestry because we don't have a real firm grasp on our own family histories going back further than two or three generations. We want that for ourselves and, in turn, for our kids so that they can grow up with a firmer foundation of who they are, and I think that will help them. In some ways, without it, we've been a little bit lost. We're trying to build that up for them and ourselves in the process.

Projects like this are great to document these oral histories because that's another thing that's not done anymore. My husband and I always talk about when our grandmas passed away, and how that generation is taking with it a lot of heritage and storytelling that just isn't shared in the same way anymore. I appreciate projects like this. Even though I wasn't a hundred percent sure on what I was getting into, I was more than happy to participate.

VC: Thank you.

SE: Charlotte, thank you so much.

I appreciate it. Like I was telling Vanessa, I'm very humbled that you guys invited me here. I feel like I'm a nobody, not doing much, but, like I said, I appreciate a project like this, and so I'm thankful that you guys invited me here. It was fun talking to you.

VC: Yes, thank you so much for agreeing to do this, and you're not a nobody. You've done so much, and it was so interesting. Thank you.

I appreciate it.

[End of recorded interview]

APPENDIX



BIOGRAPHY



UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLOTTE A. PITTMAN

Lieutenant Colonel Charlotte A. Pittman was born in Long Beach, California. She grew up in a Navy family, living in Hawaii and the Philippines before her family planted roots in Pueblo, Colorado. She currently resides in Las Vegas with her husband Carlos and their four sons, Xavier, Maxwell, Isaac, and Zachary. Since July 2021, she has served as the 726th Operations Group Deputy Commander. In this role she develops, publishes, and executes plans, policies, and strategy to support 726th Operations Group, 49th Wing, 319th Reconnaissance Wing, and 432nd Wing integrated Remotely Piloted Aircraft mission requirements.

Lieutenant Colonel Pittman graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 2003. She completed pilot training at Laughlin AFB, Texas, in 2005, then was assigned to Pope AFB, North Carolina, as a C-130 pilot. She cross-trained into the RPA community in 2008, then joined the Air Force Reserve in 2013. She is a veteran of Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, Freedom's Sentinel, and Inherent Resolve. Lieutenant Colonel Pittman is a senior pilot with over 3,100 flying hours, including 1,850 combat hours.

Prior to her current assignment, Lieutenant Colonel Pittman served as Chief of the Commander's Action Group, 91st Attack Squadron, Creech AFB, Nevada. She was responsible for managing awards, decorations, and special projects for the squadron, as well as flying combat missions to provide United States senior leadership worldwide persistent attack and reconnaissance in support of combat operations.



EDUCATION

2003 Bachelor of Science, Physics, United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO

2009 Squadron Officer School, by correspondence

2012 Master of Science, Engineering and Environmental Management, American Military University

2019 Air Command and Staff College, by correspondence

ASSIGNMENTS

1. February 2004 – February 2005, Student Pilot, 47th Flying Training Wing, Laughlin AFB, TX
2. March 2005 – September 2005, C-130 Student Pilot, 314th Airlift Wing, Little Rock AFB, AR
3. October 2005 – February 2006, Executive Officer, 41st Airlift Squadron, Pope AFB, NC
4. March 2006 – August 2009, Chief of Scheduling, 2nd Airlift Squadron, Pope AFB, NC
5. September 2009 – November 2010, Standardization and Evaluation Liaison Officer, 11th Reconnaissance Squadron, Creech AFB, NV
6. December 2010 – September 2013, Chief of Training, 29th Attack Squadron, Holloman AFB, NM
7. October 2013 – August 2015, Flight Commander, 78th Attack Squadron, Creech AFB, NV
8. September 2015 – August 2016, Director of Operations, Detachment 1, 726th Operations Group, Creech AFB, NV
9. September 2016 – August 2018, Director of Staff, Detachment 1, 726th Operations Group, Creech AFB, NV

10. September 2018 – March 2020, Commander, 926th Force Support Squadron, Nellis AFB, NV
11. April 2020 – June 2021, Commander's Action Group Chief, 91st Attack Squadron, Creech AFB, NV
12. July 2021 – Present, Deputy Commander, 726th Operations Group, Creech AFB, NV

FLIGHT INFORMATION

Rating: Command Pilot

Flight hours: More than 3,100 including 1,850 combat hours

Aircraft Flown: C-130E, C-130H, MQ-1B, MQ-9A

MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

Meritorious Service Medal with oak leaf cluster

Air Medal with oak leaf cluster

Aerial Achievement Medal with six oak leaf clusters

Air and Space Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters

EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION

Second Lieutenant May 28, 2003

First Lieutenant May 28, 2005

Captain May 28, 2007

Major June 16, 2014

Lieutenant Colonel August 19, 2019

(Current as of Mar 2022)