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**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH COL
CHRISTOPHER J. SPINELLI
VICE COMMANDER
AIR FORCE TEST CENTER**

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JOHN T MURPHY

**AIR FORCE TEST CENTER
EDWARDS AFB, CA**

17 MARCH 2020

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EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, CALIFORNIA
AIR FORCE MATERIEL COMMAND
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

UNCLASSIFIED

Interview

with

Colonel Christopher J. Spinelli,

Vice Commander

Air Force Test Center

Edwards AFB, California

17 March 2020

Date Signed: 20200501

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Historian, Air Force Test Center

CHRISTOPHER J. SPINELLI, Col, USAF
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The opinions and facts expressed in this interview are those of the speaker. These comments have been transcribed as they were recorded during the interview. Unless otherwise noted, no attempt has been made to check or correct dates and other facts mentioned by the subject. The opinions are those of the subject and do not necessarily represent those of the United States Air Force or the Air Force History and Museums Program.

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Murphy: This is Mr. John Murphy, Air Force Test Center (AFTC) History Office, Edwards Air Force Base (AFB), 17 March 2020 at 1430L with Col Christopher J. Spinelli, AFTC Vice Commander. We are doing this oral history interview, documenting 24 years of service in the United States Air Force (USAF). One of the things that I was wondering, was “WORM,” that is your call sign and I believe these names are given to pilot by other pilots. There must be a good story behind that name. Would you like to share?

Spinelli: So, you’re asking about my call sign “WORM” spelled like it sounds W-O-R-M. However, they just, they, my first squadron, the squadron that gave it to me, which was the 69th Fighter Squadron, they used to be at Moody AFB, [Georgia] where there were F-16s, since moved to Luke [AFB, Arizona] as a reserve squadron. That was my first fighter squadron, that I was in and they gave WORM, but it actually was W-R-M is what it is. What it is really. It’s really, that is what the name is WORM, but, but it is WRM for War Reserve Mode or Material, but they thought that would look kind of weird if they saw W-R-M on there. It doesn’t have anything to do with tequila and that other shots people would use. That really you have to drink a bottle of tequila, but that’s not it. It has nothing to do with that. It’s W-R-M “WORM” War Reserve Mode or Materiel. The reason why was because when I went to my first fighter squadron at Moody I had a couple of unique sorties in the squadron. When I had my first upgrade. When you get what is called Mission Qualification Training (MQT), and I don’t know, what they call it now, 20 years ago, that is what they called it. More than about 20 ... yeah, about 20 years ago. Anyway, you go in ... and I have gotten qualified in the F-16, and now they are going to qualify me in the specific mission in the unit that I’m flying with. I went up on one sortie during that, and it was a 4v4. It was four aircraft versus four others. It was four F-16s against F-18s and I was a wingman, and brand new to the aircraft. I’m barely hanging on, right, and just trying to stay visual, and I didn’t shoot a single missile or any weapons during the engagement. We would come back to the debrief, and I walk in there, and they wanted to track all the shots. So, they get everything listed on the board and they make ... they have them all accounted for, and they talk to them during the debrief, and when the F-18s call in, they talk as well, and see if we are trading shots, and what is going on, and so, the Flight Lead comes to me and he was like, “Alright, how many for you?” And I said, “None.” (laughing) Finally, he’s like, “Wait a minute, you didn’t shoot a single missile or shoot your gun at all in a 4V4 against an F-18?” I’m like, “No.” I’m like (laughing) They’re like, “What do you do over there?” And so, All I got was visual. I never got targeted. So, that was, that was, for an event, and the other part was literally just trying to stay visual and figure out what was going on. It was pretty good with maneuvering. When you are new and you just left the RTU [Replacement Training Unit] and haven’t done much of this, and the real world is all calling, so, there was that. There was another instance again in MQT, and I don’t think I ever, I think this is the only time I ever did this. I took off when it was night, like dark out, and then the sun came up through the sortie. Like the sun rose in the LFE [LARGE FORCE EXERCISE] where we were flying south out over the Gulf, and we were going to simulate an attack on a range in Southern Florida, and I messed up my avionics, and with the day/night switch in the HUD [heads up display] in night and, I kept going and was surprised and couldn’t figure out why I couldn’t see the HUD. “I can’t see the HUD! The HUD’s not working!” We’re dropping LGBs [laser guided bombs], I think, at the time, and I’m having a hard time figuring out how to get on steering and release the bomb and

forgetting, you know, the flying W, and the MFDs [multifunction displays] down here at your knees. Needless to say, I screwed it all up. Went through try. Didn't drop any of my simulated bombs and came back and of course showed up to the debrief, the guy's going through everything and (laughing) he's like, "How was your attack?" I'm like, "I didn't drop my bombs." (laughing) [debriefer] "Why didn't you drop your bombs?" "I couldn't figure out what was going on with my HUD." I still never figured it out in-flight. We're sitting there and the guy is like, "Did you try your day/night switch?" I was like "Oh, ...". Just stupid tricks in the F-16. Anyway those were the two primary ones. There might have been something else that happened, but they are definitely the two primary ones that I remember. The cool part of the story was at the whole naming ... where they have a few folks and you usually get names then. When it came my turn and they sit me down there, and one of the other lieutenants in the squadron, he comes bebopping into the bar wearing bell bottoms and yellow glasses and he looks just like John Lennon. He looks like him, right. The shirt, the pants the whole thing, he's got a wig or something on, I don't remember what it was exactly, and he had rewrote the words of *Yesterday*, the tune *Yesterday* by the Beatles, and as an example one of the verses is "Spinelli, go ahead and shoot Fox3." So, he's singing it, and it's hilarious. At the end, he's like, "I present to you WoRM for War Reserve Material because he's saving bombs and missiles for the big war, and that's how it happened. One last story because this one is pretty funny. Then after the naming, we go out to or we were supposed to have a another large force exercise, that we were supposed to participate in at Cherry Point [United States Marine Corps Air Station] North Carolina. That's quite a haul for us. It's, a I don't remember, maybe our trek one way up there, we needed a tanker. So, we go there and on the way the weather is kind of sketchy, but the tanker hangs out, we get some gas and then everybody, the whole thing cancels. Everybody doesn't bother to fly. We're already up there, so, we are like, "OK, let's just do some of our, you know, low attacks because the weather was good to do some low attacks, and so, we used some low pops and we're going through, and I kept messing-up my avionics, every single time, and as you do a pop attack you check, you raise the nose, and you roll in on the target, and then you are supposed to designate as you get close to the target. Well, what was happening, was I was designating as I was popping and so, my symbology way off behind me so that it's blocked, and I wouldn't see anything. I'm like, "What's going on?" (laughing) I couldn't figure it out and I kept like coming through, and never seeing any symbology. It was like I was dorking it up by doing that. So, anyways (laughing) we're all on the way home and we do battle damage checks, right, and so, everybody goes through, you know, [#]2 checks number 1, 1 checks number 2, 4 checks 3, and 3 checks 4, and then after the end of your battle damage check you, "Hey yeah, everything looks good. [#]1-one bomb remaining," or no bombs remaining. He goes through and he goes, "No bombs remaining [#]1. No bombs remaining [#]2. Then it's me, checking [#]3. No bombs remaining [#]3. "Six bombs remaining [#]4!!" I'm like [#]4, and then it got quiet for a minute, and then finally Jack Maxiner, I remember his name, he goes, "They don't call him WoRM for nothing. (deep laughing) [I] Go again and I come back, and I had lead bombs, and then we're getting the debrief, "Dude, your designating over ... you have to wait to roll out to designate." It was just stupid, stupid stuff, you know, I was still learning the avionics and learning how to fly. Making dumb mistakes. Anyway, that's the story of WoRM. It stood actually WRM, but they just had to throw the "O" in there to prevent people from looking and like going, "Oh, WoRM ... (laughing). What is that? Anyways, there you go.

Murphy: Wow, they are great stories. That was good. That's it.

Spinelli: Yeah (laughing)

Murphy: Did you always have a passion to fly?

Spinelli: Yeah, so, my ... I'll tell you the story. I told this actually at my interviews that I have had recently to continue flying on the civilian side because I think it's great, right. I would say the short answer is No, but basically kind of from what I can really, with a short memory, think that it all started when I grew up in Dallas, Texas. When my parents took us out to a 4th of July celebration, and I don't remember exactly where it was, but I wasn't like uber-young, but I was probably 9 or 10 [years old] somewhere around 6th grade time frame, and we're waiting for the fireworks to start, and whatever is going on, and I can remember vividly at some point in that procession somebody was talking on the big loud speaker, and all of the sudden these four-ship of F-4s ... they came from behind and I ... you know, I mean I felt like I could just reach up and touch them. I'm not, I know technically they were probably supposed to be 500 feet AGL or something, but I don't even know what the rules were supposed to be back then, but I think they were more like a hundred feet or two hundred feet ... the ground is shaking beneath me. It was so loud and it was, you know, you can imagine with four F-4s, with each of them with their engines at full afterburner ... it was awesome. I remember looking up at them going down and it was the coolest thing ever seen. "I want to do that when I grow up." So, we went to a recruiter when I was in 6th grade. shortly after that, with my dad, they laughed a little bit and said, "Yeah, come see [us] in four more years." When your entering into high school. His name was Cordina, Lt Col Cordina his daughter was in the same class as me in high school. He told me what I needed to do, and I went to the Air Force Academy and after that I said, "I'm going to the Air Force Academy to fly jets," and that's what I did. From a fairly young age I didn't, you know, my dad was a navigator on C-130s. He wasn't a pilot. I didn't really grow up like flying or anything ... was what really did it for me.

Murphy: Your dad was in the Air Force?

Spinelli: He was. He got out as a Captain. He was a navigator on C-130s they were going to send him to Turkey. I was born at Dyess AFB in Abilene (Texas). My brother was born in Tucson [Arizona] at Davis-Monthan AFB, and then my dad got out, because they said they wanted to send him to Turkey and he wasn't too interested in that. He separated and moved to the Dallas area and that is where I grew up. I kind of knew that he was in the military as I grew up and I got older. I recognized him. Maybe it was great that I probably didn't understand that ... I remember that he would always tell me to go into the Air Force and be a pilot because as a navigator he was always like, "Don't be a navigator, be a pilot."

Murphy: You never even thought about [joining] another service, it was always Air Force only?

Spinelli: What I would say is that I applied to the Naval Academy. I was in there as well, but I always wanted to go into the Air Force. I really didn't, I didn't have the desire to go out on a boat, a big boat with 600 of my favorite male buddies. (laughing) I just wanted to be in the Air Force. It is probably partly because of what my dad did. I'm sure, you know, subconsciously there was some of that thing going on there, but there was also the planes. I mean, I, you know,

the SR-71 was my favorite as I was growing up, and the SR-71 was the coolest thing ever. I probably thought I was going to fly that thing of course. I never had an opportunity to fly it and, you know, I liked all the fighter airplanes. I wanted to fly jets. I didn't care at the time which one. I really didn't. You know, when I was growing up, I didn't say which one was my favorite plane. That's what I thought I was going to fly, but I was literally really young and naïve, and that plane is going to be around forever, but at that age, I was almost 20 and 15 years away from ever getting into a cockpit. (laughing) You don't really realize at that time what that means.

Murphy: You were commissioned in [19]96. Can you describe a little, I mean did you get the choice of what kind of airplane you would fly?

Spinelli: It ebbs and flows. Things change, there, when I graduated the Air Force Academy in [19]96, I was ... before I graduated I knew I had been selected to go to pilot training, and we were told that we knew the base. The way it worked was, when I went again, when I went through, ... this has changed, when I went through we were in *Tweets* [T-37] they don't have *Tweets* anymore. They have T-6s now, the *Texan IIs* I was in the T-37, and so, when you got done with the T-37, you know, you get racked and stacked in your class, and they literally sat in order, and then we had a list that we had, I can't remember what it was "X" number of T-38 slots and "Y" number of T-1 slots and "Z" number of, gosh what is it the C-something, the C-130 trainer that is down in Corpus Christie. I can't remember the designator of it now. Then we have, now, oh I ran out of letters here. "A" numbers of helicopters. Actually, for me I thought it would be the coolest, either be a helo pilot or a fighter pilot, but I wanted to be fighter guy, right, so, if I couldn't have got that I would have picked helos. Then I just would have thought that would have been the coolest mission. It would have really been cool. You know, flying low, they just had amazing missions, but thankfully based on where I was [in class ranking] I was selected for T-38. They went down and that's how they picked, right. So, basically, if you were in the top "X," then you got the choice of T-38 which meant fighter/bomber track, or you got, if you were below that you didn't know if you were going to have T-38 available or not. Generally speaking, people selected the -38 who were in the top percent. I don't remember specifically if that was exactly how it went down. In my class, if somebody who was selected a T-1 that was the *Jayhawk* and the going to (inaudible) they still fly it. It would be the tanker-transport, but I always had my thing to fly the T-38s. I got that. Then after, you got through that hurdle, you went to the next training, the T-38, the T-1, or the helo or the C-130 trainer, and then for the, I don't remember what was next. I think it was the for the fighter anyway. I know exactly how it worked and I think they did the same thing for the T-1 side. That one was unique, in that you were ranked again the 1 to "N" in the -38 band, but the drop was between all of the bases. At Sheppard [Air Force Base, Wichita Falls, Texas] at the time, because all, because everybody got T-38s there. Everybody went to T-38s. So, at the Euro-Jet training [Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training, ENJJPT] at the time, you know, what they may have been included at the T-38, and when it became the -33, my memory is foggy on this, it was that the T-38s combined drop whether it was Vance [AFB, Oklahoma] Columbus [AFB, Mississippi], I think Sheppard may have been in there, probably was, and the way it worked was, and again same thing "X" number of F-16s, "X" number of F-15s, "X" number of F-15Es "X" number of A-10s, "X" number of B-1s, B-52s, and they started with the number one at Vance, the number one at ... and it just went around to number two, number three. I want to say, I was number three or four on the T-38. I

wanted to fly the F-16. I was the ... out of the platform that were out there, and I was ... there was still some of the available, and I was picked and went out there. Now, it ebbed and flowed and sometime, like after I left, they changed it to where the IPs [Instructor Pilots] selected they thought that they were more better inclined to choose their frame, that, you know, they should or should not go to and, you know, and so, you didn't always get your choice. Where it stands now, once I got what I wanted, I stopped paying attention, (laughing) you know, tapping the classes behind me, right, wrong, or indifferent, I was young and naïve at that. Well, you know, "I got mine." And moved on, but it has changed over the years and sometimes they give these kids some choice and the IP gives you some choice. I'm sure there is probably some variation of the two and the students get to put their inputs in. IPs still make the final decision. I don't know what is happening.

Murphy: Great. You flew the F-16 in SOUTHERN WATCH and OIF (Operation Iraqi Freedom).

Spinelli: Yes. So, [Operation] SOUTHERN WATCH was in [19]99, sorry did you want me to talk more about it.

Murphy: I just thought, if you have a wonderful war story from your deployment ... (laughing).

Spinelli: Yes, in [19]99, I deployed out of Moody AFB for Operation SOUTHERN WATCH and that was ...

Murphy: Was that Al Kharj Air Base Saudi Arabia?

Spinelli: No, we flew out of Al Jaber [Air Base] in Kuwait. We went to Kuwait, my first deployment was Kuwait, al Jaber, Kuwait, and we flew out of there and it was ... the missions there, we would do multiple days. Most of the missions we would fly, recce [reconnaissance] missions sometimes were just kind of using target pods to look for things. We also did do ... we did drop bombs and do other missions. We were shot at I will say that. I won't forget that. You know little puffs of clouds ... I dropped, I think it was two or three times, the exact number I don't remember. I do remember one. No, it was at least twice. One of them, I think it was more than that, but one of the times I dropped it was a relay sight that was underground. Got him in the southern part of Iraq, and I remember that it was really challenging to find that target. Our imagery was not (laughing) great and it didn't always match what it looked like in our targeting pod, you know, compared to nowadays it was not that great, but we wound up finding the target, which was pretty good, and hit it with a GBU-10 [Guided Bomb Unit] GBU-10s with delayed fuse that and hit a basically a comm [communication] node that was connecting them. So, that one, the other one was a triple-A [Anti-Aircraft Artillery, AAA] piece was the other one that I hit. That was also pretty challenging. It wasn't exactly in the right location. It moved and so, I was looking around, I found and dropped and it was on the one of the more interesting drops of mine. Then I remember, there was a big to do, and that was one of the guys went out and they were looking for a radar and, you know, there was all these bunkers and the Iraqis would move the stuff around, right. So, you would have multiple bunkers, and the radar would initially be in one of them. Invariably, the radar was move and not where the intel [intelligence] said the radar would be. He didn't see (laughing) he didn't see it there, and he was flying around and then

found one that was in the open and hit that. I remember there was a lot of consternation over dropping and the leadership wasn't sure if he should have hit the other radar. It turns out that they had moved it and it was a valid target. It was a, it was a pretty good, you know, it wound up looking out for them, but you don't know really what that was, right? Because it is not where you think it is. That can be perhaps not very good (laughing) to hit something that you shouldn't. One of the craziest things that happened over there was two things. First, Kosovo happened while we there. We're there and we're ... you know, the news was all about, still about SOUTHERN WATCH, Iraq, and what was happening in Iraq and then Kosovo kicked off. It was like you never heard about Iraq again and that war started and ended. In all while, we were still in theater. The other ... So, that was crazy. We used to watch what was going on in Kosovo on TV [television] while we were eating and I'll never forget the night, we would be listening to the news and we hear ... you never heard about Iraq and there was things still happening there. We were still getting shot at. We were still dropping bombs. Things were still happening there, but the news never reported on it and again at least as best that I could tell. The other thing that happened was that, that was when the AEF [Air Expeditionary Force] construct kicked in. When we went overseas, what had happened was ... the plan that we put in place for it ... at Moody there were two squadrons, the 69th which is where I was, the Werewolves, and the 68th the Lightning Lancers, and we had taken the 90-day deployment window that we were supposed to be there, and the two 45s [days] We were going to be there 45 [days] the other unit was going to come over 45 days later, and then that was going to be it. You know, the next unit was going to rotate in and go about their business. Well, what winded up happening is Kosovo kicked off and while we were sitting there we were literally, I want to say, that it was like the 38-40 day mark. It was at the point where I was on my phone with my wife and, "I'm going to see you next week," kind of deal right? Then our squadron commander Coleman, pulled us in, at the time, and said, "Alright, here [it] is, they are starting this new AEF thing and it is ... and it will start at the beginning of the fiscal year, basically 1 October. So, he said, "Moody

[Col Spinelli answered a cell phone call, pausing the interview]

[Interview resumed]

"Moody has to fill the bill until the ... actually funny enough. The 421st [Fighter Squadron] Hill [AFB, Utah] comes over to relieve us on 1 October. Well, this is like March, ...

Murphy: You are at day 40 in March?

Spinelli: Yeah, I can't remember exactly, but maybe it is ... I don't remember the exact timing it's later than that. It's like May. It is probably May. It's summer time and it was warm, and then he was like, "Here's what we are going to do." We the 69th were getting extended an additional 60 days, two months, to make it, that we would be there over 100 days, and the Lancers were coming over on the 8th to fill the rest of the time, to take us out to October and finish out the cycle. So, I had to call back my wife, "Remember, we were coming home next week. Ahh, make that two more months." That was a bit of a, that was a bit of a shock, right? Now, we are going to be gone for an additional 60 days, and so, that's what wound up happening. We went over there and the unit that came to replaced us again. The 421st from Hill AFB will be interesting later on for, you'll understand why. So, we get back from the tour and

all that, and then I and that Moody, and Moody, the F-16s were told we are going to shut Moody and like Moody is leaving. The 69th is getting shut down. So, there is not going to be anymore F-16s, you're gonna, we are going to have to go somewhere. Me and [my] wife are talking ... I tried to get over to Korea, and we had, well we had Spangdahlem [Germany] number one or Aviano [Air Base, Italy], Aviano number one. Italy, to go over we're then Korea and together, I think Spang and then I think it was number five in our ... they weren't going to send me over to either Spangdahlem or Aviano and actually it was the silliest thing ever. Korea didn't want any inexperienced people. They only wanted people who were experienced, which is like 500 hours or more in the F-16. I was like 450 or something. They said they didn't want, they didn't want me

[can you pause it for a second – Col Spinelli answers another phone call]

[Interview resumed]

Spinelli: Where were we? Talking about deployments, right? We came home and then where I was, yeah, for PCS [permanent change of station] they didn't want to send me to Korea, they didn't want to send me overseas, and so, it was number five, and the AFPC [Air Force Personnel Center] folks were all mad, because they got their stats from, if you got a top three [choice/pick] they can, you know, put it in their stats. They gave a top three, but mine was a number five, but it is still going ops to ops [operations] and it's a good tour to get to Hill from Moody, but they got they were upset because I (laughing hard) "Well, sorry this is my, these are my choices." I went to Hill. I went to the 421st Fighter Squadron, and so, when I was getting back there and showing up, they were actually deployed, right as I was showing up, but that was the same unit that had replaced the Lightning Lancers from Moody. When we got there and when we were there, of course, 9-11 [September 11, 2001] happened while I was at, while I was at Hill. I won't forget that, coming in that morning, and I was going to the, I don't remember, I was going to the wing building for some reason and the intel officer Harris was his name. [I] ran into him at a later date. He's out now. He's retired ... was the intel officer in the 388th. He, for whatever reason, I wasn't watching the news or anything and he came and told me we, were in the parking lot and while I was about to walk in he was like, "Do you know what is going on?" I'm like, "No, I didn't hear anything about what is going on. What are you talking about?" He's like, "Dude, we are under attack! People have flown planes into the World Trade Center." I didn't believe him. All I could say is that he's freaking nuts. He doesn't know what he is talking about. People don't fly planes into the World Trade Center. That just don't happen. That's the craziest thing I ever heard. I'm like, "Are you serious?" "I'm not kidding. It's for real!" I got in, I went back, I got in my car and I drove over to the squadron and come in, and everybody is standing at the TVs right. I know and sure enough there is pictures on the television like the World Trade Centers with smoke coming out of them, and then the stories of like, then the Pentagon, right, and then another one going in Pennsylvania and then everything going in lockdown, right. The whole country, all planes cancelled. Everything stopped. It was crazy. Absolutely insane. I remember flying on September 12th.

Murphy: Oh, wow!

Spinelli: Yeah, there weren't very many people who did that, and the people who were, were fighter jets all over the country, and we were literally capping the major cities. I was sent from Hill to San Francisco. So, I was capping over San Francisco.

Murphy: Wow!!

Spinelli: Flying over, literally the next day. We started 24/7 [24 hour / 7 days a week] ops and our planes, we would take off as two-ships, and we would take off and fly, and I'll never forget that, my first sortie was at night, we took off and it was in ... made it ... was crazy. There was nobody talking. Like the centers, nobody, like it was dead quiet. The only thing you ever heard was a life line going on a helicopter. Either a helicopter or like some other life flights a C-130 or C-17 or something, or some other life flight helicopter that was flying and that was it. There is nobody, nobody else in the air. Nobody else was allowed to fly.

Murphy: Spooky huh?

Spinelli: Yeah. It was really weird. Then as it went on, of course, and we figured out what was going on and got a handle on it, you know, that didn't last for too long. Then the planes started taking off, right, so, what we would do is we would, we would track them, literally track them as they were taking the active runway, for the runway, and we would just follow them for like ... We would literally keep them in a targeting pod and if they were like taking off, like in San Francisco most of them would be taking off out over the sea, and across the ocean. A lot of them would. At least the ones that we were following. We would just follow them until they got far enough away and then let them go, and then because in case they ever turn around, we would go, and we have talked, like literally in our briefs, and stuff, talked like shooting down an airliner.

Murphy: Hmm.

Spinelli: I didn't ever [think] that we would do that. That happened 9-11. We did that. We flew, we flew over the Olympics as well in 2003 at Salt Lake City, [Utah]. Yeah, we were still capping at that point, still flying, and the jets, you know, obviously the time on the jets were like exploding. We even deployed to San Francisco at one point, and to Travis [AFB, California] and were doing operations out of there; scrambles and other stuff. Then we went overseas for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM [OIF]. It was the tail end of it. Where the shooting had occurred. We, by the time we were showing up, we were doing a lot more like shows of force. We were still dropping bombs occasionally, but it did happen, but I remember what I told my wife because ... when we were leaving over there, my wife was pregnant with our first kid, and she was due like a week, if I stayed the entire time, a week or two after I was supposed to get back, and that was cutting it pretty close. I was the one that was supposed to go over for about 45 days and then come back and be relieved by another individual. (laughing) I remember what I left telling my wife like, "You know what happened when we were at Moody right? I'm coming home in a hundred days. Like just prepare yourself for wat's going to happen. I'm coming home in 100 days," and she's like, "I got it." Sure enough, we got over there we're flying the operations, and I was a flight commander at the time which was in a fighter squadron. That was your first kind of big leadership role in the fighter squadron. When you basically work directly for the Director of Operations, work for the squadron commander. You know, I was an IP, fairly senior in the

unit, and so the point being I wasn't just a line pilot anymore. I wasn't a slick wing captain and you were just flying the line as a wingman, and unfortunately, we had a pretty sad incident where one of the guys had to eject and so he did. He got out. The airplane was destroyed they picked him up, the rescue helicopter picked him up, and I don't know how much I can get into any specifics of that, but regardless he got sent home and he was one of the other flight commanders and a good friend of mine, as well. He got sent home and before my squadron commander even told me, I ... and right away I knew that they were going to tell me that now, we had to send somebody home, right, that means that I wasn't going to be able to go, and so, I called Amy [Mrs. Spinelli] my wife, and I, "Hey, babe remember when I said I was going to be here for a hundred days (pause) I'm going to be here for a hundred days." She's like, "Really." I'm like, "Yup, I'm not going to be able to leave. Can't tell you why, but ... you're going to hear about it, some stuff that's going on, we'll figure it out." Then probably a few hours later squadron commander called me in ... I'm like is this [inaudible] boss. I already called Amy and told her that I'm going to be here for the entire deployment." He's like, "That was easy." (laughing hard) I had a feeling you were going to be calling me in to say that. Like OK. Good. I'm glad you already knew that. That's what ended up happening and [I] wound up staying the whole time. I don't remember how many days specifically, but it was somewhere close to the 100 point mark. Maybe just under, but I wind up getting home and my wife was still pregnant, and I was actually around for my first child's birth. It was two weeks, two weeks later, he was born or something like that after I got back, but anyway, it was ... that was the stories of my ... those were the stories of my deployment. The other good war story I guess, it is a war story we were capping on the, (several seconds of computer dinging) sorry about that.

Murphy: No problem, don't worry.

Spinelli: Capping on the uh, near Iran, and there's a big group of people, and we were going to do a show of force and the flight lead and I was the IP and the flight lead was doing these big circles ... Iran was talking to us on "Guard" and telling us you know "F-16 ... you know, with the accent, "F-16 near Iran border, you stay out of sovereign airspace. We're going to send ..." Whatever their ... "Air interdiction." I can't remember exactly what they use. There's some craziness like that, right, and she had turned off "Guard" because what had happened is a lot of times you get this crappy static on it and you get so annoyed you just ... when you turn it off you weren't listening to it. Whenever I would fly as an IP or wingman, I left it on because I knew that we had to. It was annoying. I never knew who was talking to us and sure enough they were doing ... just kept going on and finally I'm, I was like, "Hey, I think we probably ought to consider doing a figure 8 to the south and the east near the town. Iran is talking to us on the "Guard" and going to send their interceptors and I think you probably turned it off right. "Yeah! I highly recommend we do that. Let's just keep going until they stop talking to us." They did. That was pretty funny. There are some other funny stories, but I'll be here all day so.

Murphy: OK, wow man. They are good stories. Let's talk about Col Spinelli and Edwards Air Force Base.

Spinelli: Yeah.

Murphy: You went to Test Pilot School as a Developmental Test Pilot.

Spinelli: Well I wasn't then but that was what I became.

Murphy: What exactly is a developmental test pilot? What does that mean?

Spinelli: The whole concept or idea, the idea of a test pilot really started back in the Chuck Yeager days, and probably before that even, but that designation would have started back then where airplanes would come out, and they were proven, right. So, we had flown them before. So, the idea of a test pilot was that he was going to get in the airplane and have really good flying skills. He would need to handle the airplane or unique situations and come back, have handling qualities and talk about how to make it better. Why was it flying the way it should be with design improvement, and that was the original developmental test pilot, as it's sometimes called. When brand new planes come out, they do that. Nowadays, they do that. Absolutely, a F-35 is a recent example. The KC-46 is another one. Contractors are still heavily involved with helping out with testing. You go through a year-long school of specialized training and learning how to do that. What to look for, what to do on the test program, you know, crawl-walk-run. Get exposure to a variety of different airframes. Flying different ways. Like it's ... fly, why they fly do unique characteristics. Why airplanes have things on them that they have on them. As an example, on the, if you ever saw the 747 that carried the space shuttle [it] had two huge rudders on the outboard, on the tail, that wasn't normally there. The normal tail on the two well why is that? Well, because when the space shuttle loaded on it, it blocks the tail, right. The airflow over the tail was significantly reduced and in order to get the directional control you needed, they had to install those tails there. Kind of the same thing on the F-16, where you saw if you ever looked on the bottom there is two little strakes on the bottom of the F-16, well what is that there for, to provide directional stability in the high AoA type of regime, when the tail starts getting blanked by the nose and this gives little bit of extra stability. They weren't there originally, but were added as you went through the test program. Those were examples of things that were done, and there are others, but those are probably two pretty good ones. And so, it was a great school you kind of started off with performance and flying qualities stuff, you know, traditional things that you would, you know, we I would say the enterprise, the test enterprise, you know, the contractors and the Air Force, we understand how planes fly pretty well now. It isn't to say that we always get it exactly right, but we generally know how they fly or the characteristics the you are going to get with different designs and ... So, the performance and flying qualities is still being done. You need to do that work. You know, models are never good enough, right. You ... it's the old saying that every model is wrong, some are useful. (laughing) That is a 100 percent true, right. There is no model that is perfect. So, or as General Azzano [Major General, Christopher P., Air Force Test Center Commander] would say, "Dreams meet reality." We go out and make sure that those dreams match reality. Now sometimes they don't, for a variety of different reasons and, you know, some that you may predict, others you may not, and then after the performance and flying qualities, we'll go into systems work which is dealing with what primarily ... what they have us do now is a little different on the fighter side is making weapons systems work right, you know, an F-35 is a great piece of tin can, if the brains don't work it doesn't do anything for you. If you can't employ it, right. Because we're not, we're not ... we don't just make airplanes that fly necessarily, kind of like an airliner. An airliner its like the tradeoffs in an airliner versus a fighter are huge right because all the airliner does is take off land carry a bunch of passengers in the most fuel efficient manner possible to save the company

money and as quick as possible. If you could, to do both efficiently and fast. The less time you're airborne, the less fuel you're burning, the quicker you get there, the happier they are. That's what you want to do, but is it possible? That's what we are interested in, right. The ... we're interested in prep [preparation] ... being our nation's sword and shield. Prosecuting whatever the tactics are. Turn and defeat our threat. The threats [are] out there, that we see are rising, and so, we'll do a lot, and a big bulk of that is that usually [is] the hardest to find the bug to, you know, kind of get in there and fix somethings. What else can you break and where do you actually make it better or not, and so, it ... you edge over that and continue to improve it and get better and later on down the line you are at where things are going to change, you know, the F-16A is NOTHING like it was envisioned back in the [19]70s. When it was first designed and built. It was day-only, VFR fighter. Now it's, day, night, all-weather precision capable machine that is not near the F-16 I remember. I remember when I was the Director of Operations of an F-16 unit out here, a test unit, and we got the link and we got color on MFDs, we got the helmet. I remember thinking this was the F-16 that I wish I always had when I was a lieutenant or what I thought it was going to be in the cockpit, because I was actually looking at the glass and how antiquated everything was on the F-16 compared to, like, what you would see in like a GA aircraft or relative tail like avionics and that kind of stuff and the truth was that we didn't spend the money to make it.

Murphy: Sir, I thank you for your time. This concludes the interview.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 05-05-20		2. REPORT TYPE Transcript		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) 17 March 2020	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH COL CHRISTOPHER J. SPINELLI, VICE COMMANDER AIR FORCE TEST CENTER				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Interview conducted by John T. Murphy				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) AND ADDRESS(ES) AFTC/HO 305 E. Popson Avenue Edwards AFB, California 93524				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER 412TW-PA-20177	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Air Force Test Center 1 South Rosamond Boulevard Edwards AFB CA 93524				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release A: distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Transcript of oral history interview conducted by AFTC Chief Historian Mr. John T. Murphy with Col Christopher J. Spinelli, Vice Commander, Air Force Test Center					
14. ABSTRACT Transcript of the oral history interview conducted by AFTC Chief Historian Mr. John T. Murphy with Col Christopher J. Spinelli, Vice Commander, Air Force Test Center on 17 March 2020. Topics covered included personal background of Col Spinelli, personal goals and wishes in aviation, anecdotal events of Col Spinelli's 24 year United States Air Force (USAF) career, high points of a deployed F-16 fighter pilot, ups and downs of being a commander at various levels in the USAF and Edwards Air Force Base's response to the COVID-19 virus pandemic.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Air Force Test Center (AFTC); oral history; oral history interview; Test Pilot School (TPS), Operation SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW) Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) Corona Virus disease – 2019 (COVID-19)					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: Unclassified			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT None	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 14	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON 412 TENG/EN (Tech Pubs)
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 661-277-3871