Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I am conducting an oral history interview with Colonel Jack Keith. I am in Lubbock, Texas, at the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech University. Mr. Keith, you are in Miami, Florida is that correct?

Jack Keith: That's right.

RV: Sir, this is Thursday morning, October the 24th. If you would sir, start with some general biographical information. Where were you born and when?

JK: I was born in Muskegon, Michigan, on 24 Sept. 1924.

RV: Did you grow up there in Michigan?

JK: Yes. I hardly left town there, until I was 18 years old and then on 5 July 1943, I boarded a train, for Keesler Field, in Biloxi, Mississippi, as an Aviation Cadet, in our United States Army Air Corps.

RV: Is it a relatively small town?

JK: I believe the official records, indicate about 50,000 inhabitants.

RV: How would you describe your childhood there?
JK: I was one of three children. I had one brother and one sister. My Father was an independent garage man and my mother was a Register Nurse. We family members, experienced few inconveniences during the Depression; although, it was a bit tough, at times, for my father in his attempts to collect fees, for the work he performed on his clients vehicles. As a young boy and up until I left home, we did a great deal hunting & fishing, there in the mid-west; however, I learned to love all of these little creatures after a few years in the service and, I now protect them!!! I just went on through the School System until 1943, when I graduated and entered the Service!

RV: So both of your parents worked?

JK: Yes they did.

RV: What did you do? Did you work during your youth there?

JK: The only work that I performed during my last year, or so, of school was to drive a Railway Express Agency [REA] delivery truck; similar to FedEx & UPS of today.

RV: Sir, what do you remember about high school? What were your favorite subjects and were you involved in sports and things like that?

JK: I don't remember too much about high school, nor my subjects, as I was so caught-up, with the radio & newspaper news on WWII that, I feel fortunate, that I was able to end up, with exactly the number of "Points" that it took to graduate. I do remember taking such subjects as English, Math, Algebra, Geometry, Chemistry and, of course, the Principals of Aviation. As far as sports were concerned, I did alright in the gym; thundering about with a bit of basketball and things of that nature; however, when the football coach told me to give my school provided, football shoes, to one of the other players, who outweighed me considerably I figured that they didn't need any 115 pounders, like myself!
RV: What were your favorite subjects in high school?

JK: Again I imagine the three "Rs," and "The Principals of Aviation!" I was never really thrilled over schooling, as all I could think of, was to graduate, earn my wings and get involved in WWII!!!

RV: Why were you interested in the military? Did you have military tradition in your family or was it something that you wanted yourself?

JK: My Father was assigned to the Quartermaster Corps during WWI, as an Enlisted Man! Of course, he was proud that he had served. When WWII came around, I was the only son, of age, as my brother was four years younger than I, so he wasn't going to make it! The Bottom Line: I was interested in aviation from way back and, hearing about the air-to-air "Dog Fights" in Europe and the Pacific, from the various news medias I became hooked, and felt that, I can do that, all I have to do, is earn a Commission in the United States, Army Air Corps and a pair of "Silver Wings!"

RV: So you signed up before you graduated from high school?

JK: Yes.

RV: You knew that you wanted to go into the Air Force?

JK: Yes. US Army Air Corps, at that time!

RV: Exactly. How did you get interested in aviation? You said it started when you were younger.

JK: I'm not positive, but I believe that I became interested, about the time of Charles Lindbergh and Wrong Way Corrigan. The latter the Irishman, who was unable to obtain a legal clearance to fly east to Ireland from the United States. He took off anyway and flew to Europe, and when he was confronted by the Aviation Authorities his excuse was: "I thought, that I was
flying west!" Hence he became known as "Wrong Way Corrigan!

RV: Were you ever scared or nervous of flying, being up in the air?

JK: No. Never was.

RV: I guess you can't be, to fly so much; you need not to have that kind of fear. After you graduated from high school, this was, I guess in June of 1943?

JK: That's right.

RV: You immediately went to Basic Training?

JK: Right.

RV: Where was your Basic Training?

JK: I graduated from high school on 15 June 1943 and on 5 July; I was aboard a train to Basic Training, at Keesler Field, Mississippi.

RV: How would you describe your Basic Training?

JK: Primarily physical. A great deal of calisthenics, Obstacle Courses, Orientational Gas Chambers, KP and Guard Duty. In short: "All of the Basics!" Challenging to an 18 year old!

RV: Was it really difficult for you physically or any other way?

JK: Not at all! I enjoyed pretty much everything that they threw at us, as I felt that it would all culminate in a Commission and Silver Wings! The food was fine; although I don't recall any fabulous beef steaks, that the folks went without and were told that their sacrifices were because of "Our Boys!" We were kept so busy, that we didn't have time to think of home, or anything else, for that matter.

RV: Did your training focus on WWII and what was happening and, where you might be going after Basic Training?

JK: Yes, everything focused on WW II! Actually, there were something like seven
phases of training, following Basic Training; totaling a duration of approximately 18 months, before we were eligible for our commission & wings. It was approaching graduation, from our Advanced Flying School, where we truly became anxious as to what Theater of Operations that we would be assigned and, what we would be flying!!!

RV: How long was your Basic Training?

JK: About six weeks! 19 months to my commission & wings.

RV: Six weeks, from Basic Training, where did you go?

JK: From there, I traveled by train to Ft. Ethan Allen, in Burlington, Vermont. They had a College Training Detachment [CTD] there at the University of Vermont; which they had at several colleges. The CTDs were utilized as a kind of filler, to take care of the overage of Flying Cadets, as early as 1943, as the "Pilot Pipe Lines" began to back up. Kind of like placing a train on a siding, until the excess traffic is manageable! So, I spent a semester at the University of Vermont, before reentering the Flight System.

RV: What did they teach you there for that one semester?

JK: Pretty much math, science, history and English again. And, also plenty of calisthenics and First Aid!

RV: When did you first enter the cockpit to fly?

JK: We received 10 hours of dual instructions, during our short stay at the CTD; however, these hours did not lead to solo flight, but for simply orientational purposes, where the civilian instructors, got more out of it, than we did! In fact, it was in December and January, during a severe winter and, we couldn't feel our hands or feet after an hour in these very small aircraft. The instructors were issued our latest winter flight gear, while we cadets, wore our wool GI Issue clothing! We actually entered the cockpit in earnest, in May of 1944, in Primary Flight
Training, at Helena, Arkansas.

RV: After you left college in Vermont, where did you go?

JK: We took a train to Nashville, Tennessee, where the Cadet Classification Center, was located. It was here, where it was determined, through a myriad of cyclometer and written test scores, whether you were classified as a Pilot, Navigator or Bombardier.

RV: And, this is January of 1944?

JK: Right, January & February.

RV: Did you get to select what you wanted to do, or did they select you?

JK: You are selected, by them, as determined by how you did, on the written and coordination examinations/exercises!

RV: So you were designated a Fighter Pilot, or simply Pilot?

JK: At this juncture: We were designated as a Single Engine Pilot! 18

RV: Ok, so you qualified for that. I take it your eyesight was up to par. If you had done really well on all the exams, but your eyesight was not what they wanted, you would have been out, is that correct?

JK: That's right; we had to have 20/20 eyesight, without corrective glasses.

RV: Wow, so you're blessed with good eyes.

JK: That's right.

RV: After this, in Nashville, and you've been there for a couple of months, from there where did you go?

JK: There again, like the CTD up there in Vermont, where we were placed on a side rail, we spent February and March of 1944, at the Marianna, Florida Air Base, where we again marked time, waiting to go to Maxwell Field, in Montgomery, Alabama, which housed our Pre-
Flight Aviation School and, put us back into the Main Stream!

RV: Right. At this point, you still had not flown?

JK: That's right.

RV: Were you itching to get going?

JK: Yes. Every once in awhile, we would see a fighter aircraft parked on the ramp, of one of the bases, that we were assigned; for example, there at Marianna, Florida, there was a P-40, Warhawk, parked on the Flight Line one day and, we would slip over and take a look at it.

RV: What did you do there at Marianna? What was your training?

JK: Practically nothing. It was primarily calisthenics again and that type of thing.

RV: How much contact did you have with your family through these first years?

JK: Never saw them at all for the first 19 months, but I would write regularly.

RV: I take it, your Father, since he encouraged you to enlist and your Mother, I guess; were they supportive of your military career at this point?

JK: Yes. They were behind me all of the way.

RV: How about your brother?

JK: Yes. He still had three years of school to go.

RV: Did you have any other siblings?

JK: Yes. I had a Sister, a year older.

RV: How did she feel about you being in the Service?

JK: She was behind me also. She was an RN like my mother.

RV: Basically, at this point, early 1944; of course, before the invasion of Europe [6 June 1944], did you feel like the war was kind of passing you by? Did you want to get over in the
JK: Yes. That was the big thing. We heard of all the aerial kills in Europe and the Pacific and I thought: "Gee, I hope that it's not all over, before I can get over there!"

RV: You wrote in your memoirs, that you sent us, that it's every aviator’s dream, when you are in the Military Service, that it's a privilege to be able to serve in these conflicts. You wait for these conflicts to come up and when they do, you want to get out there and do your duty.

JK: That's right, that's what we live for! Even though, I entered WWII, in the middle of the war, and received my Commission & Wings several months before WWII ended; [VE Day, 8 May 1945] [VJ Day, 2 Sept 1945] I was terribly disappointed that I didn't get into the air battles! I will take that disappointment to my grave; and, I know many of my friends, who feel the same way, about WWII, Korea and Vietnam! At least, I was directly involved, in the latter two.

RV: So, you are in Florida for a couple of months, and then in March of 1944, you are transferred to Maxwell Field?

JK: Right.

RV: You are finally at where they are going to teach you some more straightforward aviation. What was your training like there?

JK: At Maxwell, we continued very rigorous calisthenics, with emphasis on the basics; such as, memorization of the International Morse Code and the ability to send & receive it; plus the ability, to identify all Friendly and Enemy Aircraft and Naval Vessels. This was the phase, where we were introduced to the "Drum Out," where fellow cadets, were dismissed from the Cadet Corps for such indiscretions, such as, cheating at academics! They were awakened during the middle of the night and, forced to march to the drum roll, over the PA System, down the
middle of the barracks street with their clothing bag slung over their shoulder as the entire cadet corps was formed, at attention, along the route, as the unfortunate cadet passed by! They were probably transferred to the US Army Infantry, as they left the base! The fact, that such treatment was so harsh the policy was amended, to where we would all be required to fall out and line the street, in the middle of the night and listen to the drum roll; however, the unfortunate cadet had been put on a train, the previous morning, and was transferred to his new assignment.

RV: Was this a difficult time?
JK: Not really! It was a challenging time and I did well and enjoyed that phase, from March through May of 1944, because at that point, I knew that our next stop would be into an airplane, at Primary Flight School!

RV: Were you able to make friends throughout this early training? Did you have any good friends?
JK: In those early months, I usually had one or two individuals who had similar interests to my own. Like on a weekend, with someone to walk to town with. Everything that we did, we had to walk or take a bus.

RV: What did you enjoy doing, during your free time?
JK: We would walk into the local town for a hamburger & a malt; visit the local POW Camp, if there was one in the area. Maxwell Field and Helena, Arkansas, each had one; however, their existence, wasn't advertised. On one occasion, on a sunny, Sunday afternoon, my friend Henry Peters and I swam the Mississippi River, over and back at Helena.

RV: Was this in Alabama?
JK: No. Arkansas.

RV: Ok. In Arkansas.
JK: My friend Henry Peters, was of German extraction and a real fine Troop. He heard of the German POW Camp, on the outskirts of Helena, so we made a point of hiking out to it on a Sunday afternoon. When we approached the compound, the American, civilian guards, noticed us immediately from their Guard Towers and realized that we were Aviation Cadets, from our uniforms and realized that we were simply inquisitive, so they didn't pay any additional attention to us. We sat on the grass up against the outside of the chain link fence and within a couple of minutes, there were at least a dozen German prisoners and rapidly building in numbers, as Henry chatted with them in German. The only prisoners, who didn't respond, were the old "3rd Reich, Die Hards!" They simply paced around the perimeter, with their hands laced behind them and looked disgusted with their Countrymen chatting with we Americans. The strangest thing about this visit, was the fact, that the German POWs told Henry, that they knew that the area around the POW Compound, was simply a Hollywood type of false neighborhood, to fool them into believing, that the United States wasn't a shambles because of the war and was just short from falling to the Axis Powers! We laughed at this crazy idea of theirs; however, Henry couldn't convince them otherwise!

RV: What did they talk about, do you remember?

JK: I'm not sure! About family and things of that nature, as Henry's Folks were born in Germany.

RV: Really? So they thought, at this point, they were winning the war?

JK: That's right.

RV: Back to your training in Helena, Arkansas. This is where your Primary Flight Training took place?

JK: That's right.
RV: What was that like for you?

JK: That was great. We had the same type of schooling again; with school in the morning and flying in the afternoon or vise versa. We flew the PT-19 single-engine, aircraft. There were four of us cadets under our civilian instructor; a Mr. DeSalvo! We would fly with him individually, each day, until we accrued approximately 10 hours of flying time, before he would climb out of the aircraft and tell us to take it up alone. The instructors usually tore us down so thoroughly, in an attempt to destroy our confidence, right up until the time they would climb out of the aircraft; exclaiming: "Well, go ahead, and go it alone if you're going to kill yourself, you certainly aren't going to take me with you," it would almost make you feel like crawling out of the aircraft too!!! Regardless of the supposedly indifference, on behalf of my instructor, I shoved on the throttle and soloed and returned to the field and landed.

RV: Were you the first to solo in your flight?

JK: Right. I was the first of we four. I don't know if it was simply alphabetically; Keith, Kelly, King and Kosoredes or just how the order was arranged. I do know, that I was surprised, when the instructor crawled from the bird; after he had just told me how sorry I was and told me to take it up alone!

RV: So you are up, for just a few minutes?

JK: Yes. Probably for 10 to 15 minutes. They always told us, when you come around for a landing and are seeking the ground and, you bounce, rather than to attempt to salvage the landing, where there is a tendency to over control and to invite disaster; simply, apply power and continue around for another attempt. Of course, I bounced, and went around for a text book landing on the second try. Our boy Kosoredes, made 17 tries; bounced and went around 16 tries and finally got down on the 17th pass; just before he would have ran out of gas!
RV: Did you guys give him a hard time about that?

JK: A little! He was the one, who told the instructor, at the outset, when asked that he had previous flying experience and would require very little supervision. Of course, like most of us, he didn't have any flying time and, I heard that he had "Washed Out" during the Basic Flight Training Phase [Primary, Basic & Advanced]!

RV: How much flying time did you log during this Primary Flight Phase? Was flying a daily event?

JK: Yes. I flew 65 hours in Primary; 110 hours in Basic; and 77 hours in Advanced. A total of 252 hours upon receiving my wings.

RV: Did you feel like you received adequate training there in Primary?

JK: Yes. I thought that it was great.

RV: How long were you there at Helena?

JK: That was May through July 1944.

RV: In July of 1944; did you graduate or did they just move you on?

JK: I do not recall any formal graduation, we simply boarded, the proverbial "Troop Train" again, in August of 1944 and "Choo Chooed" on to Greenwood AB, Mississippi where we settled down for Basic Flight Training.

RV: Describe that move to me.

JK: They took us by "6 by 6" trucks from the base to the train station in town, where we boarded the train from Helena, Arkansas to Greenwood, Mississippi. That route, was where one of our cadets, inadvertently walked off of the back of the train in the middle of the night!

RV: He walked off of the train?

JK: What had happened we had six or eight rail cars behind the engine. Several times during the middle of the night, the train would stop for various reasons along our route and, on
one stop, they uncoupled several of the last cars at a Flying School in that area; a procedure, among many, that was never explained to us before hand. To make a long story short, one of our cadets who we called "Leaky," arose in the middle of the night and made his way back to the car behind ours, to use the latrine, as he had been doing through the night. Unfortunately, the train had been uncoupled, immediately behind our car and, poor Leaky, simply stepped out and onto the rails, in stark darkness and we didn't know that he was no longer with us, until they took a head count in Greenwood, Mississippi. After contacting the stops along our route, he was found in a hospital, where it was found that he had survived his trip to the potty! He joined us later, very peaked and somewhat lighter and with a limp! He was eventually transferred back a class.

RV: But he rejoined you eventually?

JK: Yes he did. But I don't remember anything after his return to the base; other than the fact, that he fell back to join the class behind us!

RV: What was your training like here? This was your Advanced Training Phase?

JK: No. Greenwood, Mississippi, was Basic Flight Training.

RV: This was your Basic Flight Training Phase?

JK: Yes. We went into the Valtese, BT-13, single-engine aircraft, that was considerably further advanced than the PT-19, that we flew days before. In Basic, we went on to such things, as cross country, navigational flying and night flying. Again, we attended school half of the day and flew the other half.

RV: Right. How many hours do you think you logged in Basic?

JK: I logged 110 hours in Basic.

RV: Do you feel like you received good training there?

JK: Yes.

RV: Was the military service, at this point, what you thought it would be? You’ve been in now for a year and a half or so.

JK: Yes. I thought that everything was fine. We received a bit of hazing and inconveniences, of that nature, on occasion; but to me at YOA it was a big kick.

RV: You're traveling basically all over the south. Now Greenwood, Mississippi, until November of 1944; about to transfer to Craig Field in Selma, Alabama.

JK: That's right.

RV: This was your Advanced Flight Training?
JK: Right.

RV: What aircraft did you train in there sir?

JK: We flew the North American Aviation, which again, was considerably more advanced than the BT-13. It had retractable landing gear and a controllable pitched propeller. It was a fine aircraft and, it is still discussed today, as being a great trainer, before the jet engine.

RV: Any other aircraft that you trained in there at Craig besides the AT-6?

JK: The AT-6, was the only actual trainer that I flew at Craig Field, up until I graduated in the Class of 44-K. It was here, that we screened the Bulletin Board every few minutes, after graduation, to see if we made the list to Europe or the Pacific.

RV: Ok. So this is where you could have gotten into the fight? You could have been transferred overseas.

JK: Right. I still had the rest of 1945; [VE Day, 8 May 1945] [VJ Day, 2 September 1945] to get into the fray, but the Fighter Pilot Pipe Line, was no longer accepting us, so we had to settle for flying P-40s and P-47s, there at Craig Field.

RV: Tell me about that, what would you guys do?

JK: We engaged in simulated aerial combat almost everyday; as long as we could find another fighter jock in the air and, of course, buzzing on occasion, which the Navy Troops, called "Flat Hatting!" Buzzing, was risky, as if convicted by a CourtMartial, you could be removed from the Service and fines were prohibitive! A friend of mine and I buzzed a US Army Housing Compound, adjacent to Ft. Rucker, near Napier Field, Alabama, in early 1945; and, we were eventually found out and died a thousand deaths until our Base Commander, a Colonel Clifton, who was away when we violated; after reviewing our statements, dismissed the incident. I always felt, the fact that, the Fighter Pilot Training Program, was designed to turn out Aggressive and Fearless Specimens, that he must have felt that the Program was working fine so, he elected to allow us to live another day! We were unbelievably lucky to walk away from that incident, without so much as hearing a word from Colonel Clifton! My buddies sister, who was married to an Army man, lived in the compound and that is why my friend and I buzzed her housing area!

RV: So you got off free, no problems at all. Did his Sister, your friend's Sister hear you guys fly over and did she know that it was you two?

JK: I don't know if Neal had warned his Sister previously of the fact that we were going
to dust her off, but I think she knew that it was us! Of course, when she called Selma, where Neal lived with his wife; she found out that Neal and I were airborne and figured that it was us.

RV: So you graduated in May of 1946?

JK: No, I graduated in February of 1945.

RV: I'm sorry, February of 1945 and you stayed at Craig Field for a while?

JK: Until May of 1946. At this time, things were real getting rough, as regarded continuing on in the Service; as regardless of our desires pilots were being discharged from the Service, like the leaves dropping from the trees in the fall! It was the same old adage: "Guns versus Butter," after any war and it was almost impossible to hang in there!

RV: Really, they are discharging people?

JK: Yes indeed! Of course, I would say, that the majority of them looked forward to it. They wanted to get back home to work with their fathers, attend college and, things of that nature. But there were many of us, who loved aviation and there wasn't a better place to be, where you could fly the finest equipment in existence bar none! We just had to hold our breath and hope for the best. We found out about this time also, if we had an additional duty of some kind, our chances of weathering the storm, would improve. We heard that there were two possibilities, about this time that might tide us over; one was Radar School and the other, the Holibird Signal Depot, in Baltimore, Maryland; which was the home of the Counterintelligence School. Neither of these possibilities excited me; however, the Counterintelligence School, graduated "Spies," and it sounded more intriguing than Radar School; so I signed on! At this point, I was still flying P-40s and P-47s at Craig; with only a few fighter days remaining, before shipping out!

RV: So you accepted this fate, so you could stay in the service?

JK: Yes. It was obvious at Craig, that our days were numbered.

RV: You really did think that was it?

JK: Yes. I thought that this was the only path to follow in order to tide me over.

RV: So how long were you in Baltimore?

JK: I arrived at the Counterintelligence School at the Holibird Signal Depot, in Baltimore in April of 1947. At this point, I met Lieutenant Tracy B. Mathewson III.

RV: Sir, are you there?

JK: Just a minute.
RV: Ok, go ahead sir.

JK: He was a fine young officer, who I just found out, had died recently! We were both first lieutenants and he had just arrived from another base, under the same circumstances as myself. I had never met him up until this point. So, they called me, and I went into the Interview Room, and took a seat opposite a full colonel, sitting at a large table. He gave me a briefing, on what the school was all about and, what we would be doing after graduation. He concluded, by stating: "Of course, you know that you will be losing your Flight Status, upon your acceptance to this school!"

RV: Oh. If you attended the US Army Signal School?

JK: Yes. He was in the US Army Signal Corps. He wore Crossed Signal Flags on his uniform lapels versus our Wings & Propellers! I almost felt that he was pleased, telling us that we would be losing our Flight Status, as the non-flight troops, didn't have any love for we flyboys. With his grounding comment; I thought WOW, is this man for real and, I stated: "I am not interested in the School!" He responded with: "Ok! Send in Tracy!" Tracy went through the same drill and was as shocked as myself. Tracy and I discussed the situation, as we monitored the Bulletin Board, for word of our fate. We agreed, that there were two ways that this thing could go: [1] They might accept us just for spite, to remove us from the Flying Business and introduce us into theirs, or [2] they may release us and return us to our previous bases; which would be essentially to "No Where," as we would, more than likely be discharged! We thought however, more than likely, they may release us; because of our adamant negative response to their briefing! The results of our interviews were finally posted to the Bulletin Board and, EUREKA, we were both released for lack of interest! AMEN!!! We were now free; if we could only find a favorable assignment! Tracy said that he had heard of a Colonel Ernest H. Beverly, who was currently in the process, of reactivating the 4th Fighter Group, at Langley Field, there in Washington, D.C. It was only minutes away, so we jumped in Tracy's Oldsmobile and sped over to Andrews. Sure enough, there stood Colonel Beverly in the midst of all kinds of boxes and crates, directing the off loading and distribution of tons of equipment, within his newly assigned area of operations! We stepped up to the Colonel and asked him, if he could use a couple of fighter pilots! The colonel immediately came back, and asked us if we had ever flown fighters. We both said yes and, he then asked where we were assigned, because if you have been previously assigned, it is difficult, if not impossible, to get out of one assignment and transfer to
another, without the approval of all parties concerned! When we told Colonel Beverly, that we had just been released from Holibird, he had his Adjutant call the Orders Section in the basement of the Pentagon to see if we were available. The Pentagon cleared us, and we were immediately assigned to the 4th Fighter Group; the top Fighter Group in the US Army Air Corps. How about that: Minutes be before, we were unassigned and destined to go nowhere; only minutes later, to be assigned to the Finest Fighter Group in existence!

RV: What rank were you at this point sir?

JK: A First Lieutenant. I had been in the Service about four years at this point!

RV: How long did you stay there?

JK: I spent from April through November of 1947 at Andrews. We flew the P-47N, which was a slightly larger bird than the "D" Model. We converted to jets within a few days after my arrival. I flew the F-80A on 9 May 1947; my first jet flight.

RV: How did you feel flying the jet, versus the prop aircraft?

JK: It was great! Again, there were stories going around about possible short comings of the jet; to include, the fact that the jet engine, was much slower to come up to speed when you throttled up, when compared to the propeller driven, conventional engine! This meant, that you had to think well in advance of your aircraft, when anticipating a particular move or maneuver! For example, when you turned onto the final approach for landing and, you found that you were going to have to go around; you had to apply the throttle immediately to full power, while continuing to fly your normal approach to landing. If you hesitated in the least, you could be on the runway, while the engine is still coming up to speed. The same comparison existed when taking off; the propeller driven bird would virtually leap into the air, after a relatively short take off roll, when releasing the brakes at full throttle; while the jet, during the first few seconds of the roll, was like slow motion until it finally got up to speed, after a much longer roll. And when it finally left the runway, it was much less impressive than the propeller driven bird. However, when the jet became airborne and you retracted the landing gear, you immediately obtained your 300 mph climbing speed versus approximately 150 mph, in the average conventional bird. This was over 50 years ago; and, of course, there is no comparison in the jet engines and aircraft of today in this fabulous "Space Age," where the state-of-the-art has exceeded all expectations! Because of the aforementioned engine lag and it's slow response to throttle movement in those early days, many of the older Troops were less enthusiastic, than some of we younger jocks _ so,
I managed to be the first pilot airborne in the F-80 in my 336th TFS! Incidentally the chatter was correct, regarding the engines slow response, when advancing the throttle, but there were no surprises, so long as you were aware of this.

RV: Why were the older hands a little more fearful?
JK: They had much more experience and were somewhat older! I was just over 20 and was willing to try just about anything! Like they say: "There are old pilots and, there are bold pilots; however, there are no old, bold pilots!"

RV: That's really amazing. You think of a 20 year old today and they're not going to have that kind of experience. You're flying jets in Washington, D.C. at age 20. That's incredible. You did prefer jets over the prop jobs, once you got into them?
JK: Oh yes!

RV: How about the maneuverability of the aircraft?
JK: Yes, they were great, as long as you pit jet against jet; however, when you pit a jet against a conventional bird; you must change your tactics, from in close tight maneuvering to "Hit & Run!" That is, the jet must hold high and well out to the side, when stalking a conventional bird and, then diving down, firing when within range and, then zooming back up onto the perch, beyond the range of the conventional fighter. It would be suicide, to fight in close with a P-51, or Naval F-4U, Corsair as, during such tight turning maneuvers, the conventional birds would suck your speed down so low; that they would have you in their ultimate kill range; where you would lose the advantage, at such slow speeds, where they could turn inside of you and get on your tail and close your "Big Flight Plan" [RIP]!!! Of course, today, with all of the "Heat Seeking" missiles; it's anyone's ball game!

RV: This is about when the US AF was created, is that correct?
JK: Yes. The USAF came into being on 18 September 1947, while I was assigned at Andrews Field. General Carl A. Spaatz became our first Chief of Staff, on 26 September 1947.

RV: So, you became a separate Service from the US Army, on 18 September 1947; designated as the United States Air Force [USAF]?
JK: Yes.

RV: You were at Andrews until November of 1947. At this point how much contact did you have with your family back in Michigan?
JK: Not an awful lot!
RV: Have you been home yet?

JK: Yes. I had a short leave at home, back in February of 1945, my first in 19 months, after I graduated from Flight School and another in the spring of 1947, after my stay in the hospital.

RV: At Maxwell Field?

JK: Yes. It was after I had received my commission and wings and I had received orders for Germany. This was at Craig Field, in May of 1946. It was impossible to purchase a car in those days; however, a young Marine had just purchased a new Harley Davidson motorcycle out in California and had ridden it to Selma and placed an ad in the local paper, asking $600 for it. I didn't know anything about them, but I purchased it from him, only to spill on the highway an hour later. I tore most of my clothes off and damaged the motorcycle considerably; however, it wasn't long before the troops at the local cycle shop had return it to its original state. Ninety days later, when I received the orders for Germany, I left Craig with Lieutenant Al Armstead on the back of my cui-cycle. We were both transferring to Germany and, Al's home was in northern Alabama. Therefore, I was going to drop Al off at his home and then I would continue up to my home in Michigan, where I would sell the bike and we would meet in Germany. Near Haleyville, Alabama, at approximately 10 PM, an elderly gentleman and his wife, in an old car, hit us head on at a fairly high speed. The man was DUI and he and his wife were uninjured; while Al and I spent some time in the hospital.

RV: What happened to you physical?

JK: I had a compound fracture of the Ulna and Radius in my left forearm, where the ends of the bones came through my shirt, and a fracture of the head of my left Femur in my upper thigh and a fracture of the left hip socket! Al dislocated his left hip and spent 30 days in the Maxwell Field Hospital; I was there for nine months. I lost one inch of bone from my left forearm.

RV: Seems like you were lucky to be alive.

JK: Yes, that's right.

RV: So back to Andrews Field, you're there until November 1947. You received your orders to go overseas then, is that correct?

JK: Right. The Air Force maintains detailed records on us and, we seem to move on, on an average of approximately every three years. I moved 25 times in 30 years; when you include
the many short phases, during my cadet days and the several school assignments _ however,
upon receiving my commission, transfers came more like every three years! Tracy Mathewson,
Bob Andrews and I received order, there at Andrews in November, for a transfer to Okinawa,
with the 51st Fighter Group at Naha Air Base, on the south tip of the island. Ernie Pyle, the
famous War Correspondent, was killed on Ie Shima, just a stones through off the west coast of
Okinawa. So we began flying the P-47 again; but only for a very short time, as we converted
back into the P-80, in only weeks. As usual, when transferring into a new unit, you run into old
friends; as well as, make many new friends. Jules Young, my Flight Commander, for one and,
Jim Jabara, our Assistant Flight Commander; and subsequently the First Jet Ace accomplished
during the Korea Conflict, were both new acquaintances. Jules died in Korea in 1950, when he
didn't return from a mission up along the Korean/Chinese border. Jim died a few years later,
here in Florida, when his young daughter lost control of their vehicle and rolled the car. They
both died, while Nina, his wife, and their son followed in their second car. Jim had just received
a transfer to Vietnam, to Command a Tactical Fighter Wing. He was the Commander of the 31st
TFW, here at Homestead AFB, before heading for Vietnam.

RV: He was there on Okinawa?

JK: Yes he was along with many of my friends. Jules and Jim, were a tad older than me
and were married. Tracy Mathewson and Bob Andrews, were also married; however, they did
not have their wives with them, as yet, as it took one year from the time one arrived on the island
before his wife would receive order to follow. Their tour was 36 months, if their wife joined
them. My tour as a bachelor, or an unaccompanied married Troop, was 30 months; reduced to
18 months, at a point, when I had 19 months in. I boarded an ocean vessel for Stateside, at that
time!

RV: What were you doing, when you flew there? Just getting flight training?

JK: Yes sir! We had strafing and bombing ranges, where we practiced almost daily. We
also took extended over water navigational flights, with up to 18 to 20 aircraft to such places as
Iwo Jima, Guam, The Philippines and Japan; during which times we had to log a myriad of
requirements. This included, such things, as IFR Departure and Recovery Procedures and
dozens of other requirements, that had to be accomplished biannually, in order to maintain the
proficiency expected of us! RV: How did you feel flying over the water? Was that different
for you?
JK: Fine. Not any problem. We had a Survival Pack & a Rubber Dingy attached to our parachute and there was an SB-17 Survival Bomber, within 30 minutes to one hour of us, carrying a "Life Boat," in the event we should have to swim.

RV: You were still pretty "Gung-Ho" at this point?

JK: Always!

RV: That's great. What was Okinawa like for you?

JK: When I arrived Okinawa, in November of 1947, the war had only been over about 25 months; and, everything was pretty much destroyed, to the point, where there were only small villages of thatched roof huts. The few inhabitants, that I saw, were engaged in minding small plots of crops, with crude hand wielding implements. There was a constant smell of wood burning, and an occasional low level, stratus layer of smoke from the many small cooking fires in and around the huts. The occasional mamason, that you would see hoeing in the fields, might be naked from the waist up; however, as an American would approach she would immediately turn around, or bend down and slip into her upper garment, as the American passed by! There was a university at Naha before WWII; however, the foundation of the former buildings, was all there was left. My friend, Lieutenant Roland D. Nichols, had a jeep, which we traveled about the island in, on weekends observing anything and everything of interest. The roads were very austere, made of crushed coral and, some of asphalt. Nichols and I could drive about the island, all day, and never see another vehicle. Of course, we would drive over to Suicide Point, on the east, central side of the island; which was the cliff, where dozens of Japanese soldiers leaped to their deaths, when cornered by the American Troops, during WWII. Immediately adjacent to this point, was a cave where a teacher convinced 600 young school children to commit suicide; rather than to be confronted by the American soldiers, as they arrived in their area. Of course, the natives that lived, found that the American Troops, were anything but beasts on the contrary they provided everyone who they approached, with candy and anything else, that they possessed that was eatable! There was a huge mound of bones in the cave, where the young children, had committed suicide; but, I am sure today, that they have long since been properly handled and, no doubt, a memorial raised!

RV: Wow! What did you think of the Japanese? Of course, right after the war.

JK: I spent several months in Tokyo, as a Liaison Officer, monitoring aircraft parts movements, between the Japanese Air Material Area [JAMA] and Okinawa. The Japanese were
always very polite, and I looked at them one-on-one. Occasionally, a "Papasan" who worked for the US Military, with in our Supply Complex, would invite me to a "Suki Aki" dinner at his home! This was always a very pleasant hour or two, as he would have his children play classic piano and violin after dinner. Of course, as you possibly know, his wife was never invited to join us for dinner until, I insisted so. She would then bow several times at the waist, rather timidly, and then take a seat beside her husband. The children ranged from toddlers to pre-teens and played their instruments beautifully. One very small female toddler, was so small, that her feet dangled below the piano stool over a foot from the floor. It was again a great experience associating with such fine individuals.

RV: You're there for how long, 19 months?
JK: Yes, 19 months.
RV: What were your orders after that?
JK: I received orders in December of 1949; to the 82nd Fighter Group, at Grenier Field, in Manchester, New Hampshire.
RV: That's a big difference from Okie to New Hampshire.
JK: Yes, a big difference and they didn't have jets. It was the P-51D; again which was a great conventional bird!
RV: Did you miss the jets?
JK: Not really. I figured that I would be back in jets, as conventional birds were phasing out to National Guard Units. I had flown the P_51, Mustang back in 1947, when assigned to the 4th Fighter Group at Andrews Field. While flying the P-80 at Andrews, we would report to Williams Field, in Phoenix, Arizona, occasionally to accomplish bombing and strafing requirements. Williams Field, didn't have jets, at that time, so we flew their Mustangs!
RV: Let me ask you historically, at this point, just before the Korean War and, basically we had gone forward with the Marshal Plan in Europe and the Truman Doctrine. The United States is establishing itself as one of the world leaders; of course, opposing the Soviet Union. How aware were you of the Communist versus Democracy differences that were going on? The early years of the Cold War?
JK: I was on Okinawa and in Japan, from the fall of 1947 through May of 1949; while the USSR halted the Blockade, on 12 May of 1949. The airlift ended on 30 September 1949. I was aware of the blockade during my last few months in the Pacific; however, I wasn't too
concerned, as I was busy plowing "Onward & Upward," with my many duties and was wondering where I might be posted next, about that time! During my sojourns about Tokyo, I would see General McArthur running around daily and he didn't seem to be worried either about the USSR! He always had an army of staff cars and motorcycles swarming around him and, making way for him to-and-from his quarters and office, with their sirens screaming and lights flashing! It was a real circus and, he seemed to bask in the attention. The Japanese lined his route by the thousands, bowing and carrying on like he was some kind of a god!

RV: Right, they called him the "White Emperor!"

JK: He was a real grandstander, who loved the Public Relations harangue. For example: During his "I shall return" newsreels; when he vowed to return to the Philippines, after the Islands had fallen to the Japanese; he wouldn't walk a shore from aboard the ship offshore until, all of the newsreel cameras and correspondents were in place to cover his return! I was aware of the Plans and Great Efforts, to place Europe and Japan back on their feet and, realized that this was a must, as without a healthy world economy, we would all be in deep "Kimchi!"

RV: What about the Berlin Airlift; that was a huge victory for airpower, wasn't it? It proved how capable the Air Force could be.

JK: Yes, that's right! Again I was in the Pacific, until May of 1949; and the USSR halted the blockade, during that same month. But, as you know, we didn't terminate our airlift until 30 September 1949, in order to catch Germany up during those hectic days!

RV: The airlift was in the late 40s actually.

JK: Yes. The late 40s. It began on 23 June 1948 and ended on 30 September 1949!

RV: Yes sir. I think you were on Okinawa at that time.

JK: Yes, until May of 1949! I flew over to Europe a couple of times, in early 1952, ferrying F-86 fighters to our troops at Ramstein, Germany, and we heard a great deal of the airlift during those visits; and, from articles in the "Stars & Stripes" Newspapers! Then later, I traveled the Berlin Corridor, several times, via the US Army Duty Train, from Free Europe to Berlin. It was always, at night, and the curtains were drawn so that you couldn't see much. The train would stop occasionally, while in the corridor, for administrative purposes; and, there were always Russian armed soldiers monitoring the train, while it was stopped in their territory. On occasion, we would slip a single soldier a candy bar, or some similar goody; and, he would look all around, to ensure he wasn't being observed and, then he would accept the goody and
smile in appreciation.
RV: Yes sir.
JK: That was before "The Wall" came down and it was quite an experience.
RV: I bet so. So, you're in New Hampshire?
JK: Yes. I arrived there in June of 1949 and was assigned to the 82nd Fighter Group, flying the P-51, Mustang again. The base was being deactivated soon, because of the "Butter versus Guns" equation and the critical Military Budget and it wasn't long before we were ferrying our P-51s out to National Guard units, in such places, as Elko and Reno, Nevada and Fargo, North Dakota. I made a couple of these flights, and after the aircraft were dispersed, the base folded. At that point, many of us were presented with a Form Letter, indicating that we requested "Permanent Grounding!" If we signed it, we would be allowed to continue on in the Service, but with no flying; however, if we refused to sign we would be discharged from the USAF. I signed, feeling that something just might come up in the near future; requiring our services! My next assignment, as the base folded, was back to Langley AFB, Virginia; the new home of the 4th Fighter Group. When I arrived, I immediately ran into my old friends Jules Young and Jim Jabara; where they welcomed me back into the Group, until I told them, that I had been grounded. They exclaimed: "Gee that's too bad!" Consequently, I ended up being transferred to Fort Hayes, in Columbus, Ohio, as a Liaison Officer, overseeing the training of the USAF Reserve Personnel in Ohio. The fact, that I had met my future wife, at Grenier AFB, not long before I received orders to Langley, she insisted upon accompanying me to Langley, where we could subsequently be married! She was only 17 YOA, so her mother had to sign a document to approve of her wedding. Before leaving Langley, I asked Jules Young, if he would be my "Best Man," with Jim Jabara and their wives, Mary and Nina, respectively acting as witnesses! All agreed and the wedding went off, in the Base Chapel, one evening before I transferred to Fort Hayes.

RV: How did you feel about being grounded?
JK: That was terrible and I felt very bad, being immune from any possible hostilities that might surface!
RV: Something did, right around the corner, when on 25 June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea! So you are in Ohio, until 1951. When this happened in the summer of 1950, you're grounded and isolated in Ohio, what are you thinking about? Now this is my
chance to get back into the main stream?

JK: Yes!!! I began to figure that something might come up soon, that will spell me from
this desk! Sure enough it wasn't long before a memo crossed my desk, from Headquarters at
Mitchell Field in New York. It indicated, that anyone in my category, who desired to return to
Flying Status, all you had to do, was volunteer for combat in Korea. I shot a message off to
Headquarters, indicating that I was their man and, was immediately back on FLYING
STATUS!!! For the next few days, while waiting for orders to Korea; I commuted to Wright
Patterson AFB, in Dayton, Ohio, where I flew P-51s and an occasional B-25. On one occasion, a
young captain and I flew a B-29 for seven hours one night, before it was to be decommissioned,
and possibly assigned to the USAF Museum there. He had a minimum of experience in the bird,
while I had never set foot in one until that day. It was just the two of us, where normally, it
required a minimum crew of approximately seven Troops! This was the extent of my flying,
until I received orders for Korea, in June of 1951.

RV: Sir, would you like to take a little break here?

JK: No, I'm fine.

RV: You're fine, good. In June of 1951, you get your orders and you're shipped to
Korea; is that correct?

JK: Right.

RV: Who were you with?

JK: The 8th Fighter Bomber Group, at Kimpo AB [K-14] at Seoul, Korea, where I flew
101 missions in the F-80C!

RV: How long were you in the Korean Theatre?

JK: I was there for eight months.

RV: What did you do there?

JK: I was a Flight Commander, with the 35th FBS, Black Panthers.

RV: Your missions included bomb runs?

JK: Yes. We usually flew two missions per day; including bombing, strafing and Rocket
and napalm deliveries. On occasion we would fly "Top Cover Escort" and other Special Sorties.

RV: Now this is your first taste of combat?

JK: Great. I never got hit! I received a bullet hole once in my aircraft; however, when
you flew through ground fire, that resembled hail and you tucked your elbows into your sides to
expose less of your body to munitions that might penetrate your cockpit. One was very, very fortunate not to come out of that war, resembling "Swiss Cheese!" Let's have an "AMEN" here!!! My friend Tracy Mathewson, who preceded me into Korea; by a short time, was shot down during one of his first few missions. He broke his neck when he bailed out and was shipped home for hospitalization; to his dissatisfaction, as he preferred combat to the hospital. In fact, when he was picked up by a "Chopper" the next morning of his shoot down, our Flight Surgeon, gave him a cursory physical and did not find anything of significance and Tracy was back in the Briefing Room, the next morning. The Flight Surgeon was seated directly behind Tracy, when he noticed that Tracy's neck was drastically swollen, so he called him out of the briefing. It was found then, that his neck was broken. I'm sure that Tracy felt that he could favor his neck and his problem would go away!

RV: Did you have fighter escorts?

JK: We had three squadrons of F-80Cs; approximately 27 birds per squadron! Our primary mission was "Air-to-Ground," while the 4th Fighter Group, had F-86F, Sabers and, their mission was "Air-to-Air," which was Detecting & Destroying Migs; in a sense, they were "Fighter Escorts;" however, they were not normally, specifically tasked directly to provide coverage for us, but simply flew top cover, over the peninsula during periods of heavy air-to-ground operations. In fact, occasionally the, F-86s would run short of auxiliary, external fuel tanks; because they would drop them in anticipation of aerial combat, to ensure maximum maneuverability when in contact with Migs. During periods, when they would run out of drop tanks, and we anticipated Mig interference, we would provide our own cover; that is, we would enter the target area, with squadrons in trail and, after the first squadron would dive on their portion of the target and drop their bombs, they would climb up to altitude over the target to watch for Migs as, the second squadron was diving on the target! Then when the second squadron, would finish hitting the target, they would zoom up to altitude and relieve the first squadron, while the third squadron would dive on the target. When the third squadron, finished their coverage of the target; all returned to home base, on the deck, shooting up targets of opportunity which was just about everything! There wasn't too much Mig activity in 1951, as our F-86s turned them every way but loose, in the earlier days, and they were pretty much intimidated and weren't too eager to drop down from their safer high altitudes. Our radar controllers also kept us well informed as regards the location of Migs in the air; especially, in our
area of operations. There was an experienced Russian pilot, who flew with the Korean Mig
pilots, and was an individual to be reckoned with. Our radar controllers had "Voice Prints" on
him; as well as on many others; as the enemy, also had on some of us! Therefore, when our
controllers would call out the various flights of Migs in our area; they would do so, by
transmitting: "Heads up, four trains leaving the station with Casey Jones, at the throttle!"
Trainsment: "Flights of Migs;" Stationment: "Crossing the Chinese boarder and heading our
way," and if they detected the Russian's voice, while piloting one of the Migs they would add:
"Casey Jones at the throttle!" How about that isn't that ingenious? After placing our bombs on
targets as far north as 200 miles from base, up along the Chinese border, we would hit the deck
heading south expending our 1800 rounds of 50 caliber ammunition on anything that moved!

RV: You could pick what you wanted to shoot up?
JK: Yes. Our base was on the "Bomb Line" and everything north of our base was up for
grabs. They use to brief us to shoot everything, to include oxen which were used to haul
munitions, etc.; however, that wasn't for me! Quite frequently, you would observe a single
individual walking down the beach or a road, and he would watch you as you went screaming by
at tree top level, knowing that if you couldn't snap your bird up into a tight 360 turn and put the
nose of your bird on him, you couldn't fire at him with your six, 50 caliber, forward firing, fixed
machine guns. Again these individuals had no problem with me and, I am sure with any of the
other fighter jocks! Of course, it wasn't uncommon to see tracer bullets bracketing your bird, as
the enemy troops attempted to knock you down as you screamed for home! Sometimes, you
wouldn't have any ammo left. Then you always hoped that the Migs didn't drop down and catch
you between China and Home. Also, your fuel may be down to about empty, so it was always a
tad exciting!

RV: Were you actually flying the aircraft or were you copiloting?
JK: These fighters, were all single seaters so, we were always alone; very much alone
should you be shot down!!! That low-level strafing business, at tree top level, was pretty much
the same, as our old buzzing days; without the shooting, of course. It was always a real turkey
shoot, and our "Gun Sight Aiming Point Cameras" made a pictorial record of the damages. Once
in awhile, something would blow up in your face and I always marveled over the fact that my
aircraft engine never ingested any of the debris if so, I would have had to learn Korean!!! That
would have been more excitement than I had bargained for!
RV: It was exciting? How many hours was the average round trip mission?

JK: I would say two, to two and one half hours. We carried tip tanks; large tip tanks and, without them we wouldn't have been able to remain airborne, half of that time.

RV: You did this for how long, seven months, eight months?

JK: Eight months.

RV: How did you receive your orders to leave the theatre?

JK: In my outfit, the 8th Fighter Group, the word was you either flew 100 missions, or received orders for home after one year in the theatre. Of course, most of the pilots flew their 100 missions in less than one year; myself, for example where it only took me eight months. Some of the P-51 jocks, completed their hundred, in less than six months. When I topped 100, I said well, I'm ready to go Stateside; however, the theatre wasn't that well up to speed, regarding experienced personnel, so I was tasked to function as a Base Operations Officer for an additional two months. With this unorthodox practice of holding us over, our pilots started getting a bit testy and, it wasn’t long before we were on our way home, after completing our missions! Our orders came down to our Squadron, from our Group Administrators, there on the base and, we would be aboard an Air Force, C-54 Transport aircraft in hours, heading for California.

RV: Were you disappointed to leave the theatre?

JK: Not at all! With my bride of less than two years, I was eager to get home; however, after a short time back in the States, I volunteered for another Korean tour, a couple of times, but they were not approved.

RV: What was your overall impression sir of the Korean War? The policy of the United States and dealing with that peninsula, right there on the border with China?

JK: Again, I was fairly young and "Gung Ho;" more interested in flying and the excitement of combat, than anything else. I did notice however, that the local populous, would surround our facilities with their small businesses, in their efforts to benefit from the War and, anytime that there was talk of any kind, that might suggest the termination of hostilities and the Americans returning home they were disappointed. Of course, to a degree, our industrialists possibly felt the same way, when supplying war materials during that and past wars; however, there were thousands of human beings lost in Korea and, it didn't set well to see the Korean villagers scurrying about, seemingly more interested in the American dollar, than what was going on about them! For my age I guess, I should have been more analytical myself, but I was
very much caught up in the war and somewhat concerned, should I find myself on the ground, somewhere in North Korea; unable to accompany my aircraft back to base.

RV: You were what, around 25? 26?

JK: I just came up 27, and I certainly wasn’t a kid!

RV: So from Korea, you went back Stateside? Go ahead I'm sorry!

JK: Yes. In February of 1952, I transferred to Truax Field, in Madison, Wisconsin, which was an F-86F squadron. I was a Flight Commander there, with the 432nd Fighter Interceptor Squadron, for five years, which was an air-to-air unit.

RV: Right, this is basically practicing dog fighting tactics and things of that nature?

JK: Yes. These were the same tactics, that I performed over the years, in the past, with such units as the 4th, 51st and 82nd Fighter Groups. Just a comment here: Regardless, of the designation of a Fighter Unit; whether a Fighter Bomber Group; a Fighter Interceptor Group or a Tactical Fighter Group, each may be assigned the same type of aircraft, but their assigned mission may vary.

RV: This is what you wanted to get back to for a long time?

JK: Yes. From the time that I flew the P-40 and P-47 in 1945, it was always a case, of locating other fighters in the air and then attempting to slip in behind them for a stint of simulated combat! To the point sometimes, where you would develop such a side ache, from pulling so many "Gs," that you would have to toss in the towel for the period.

RV: Did you find it difficult getting back to these tactics?

JK: No. It is simply a matter of eyesight! You had to spot the other aircraft; attempt to obtain an altitude advantage on him, if possible and, then slip in behind him.

RV: When did you meet Jodi?

JK: I met Jodi in San Francisco in the fall of 1959 or early January of 1960, while I was assigned to Hamilton Field in Marin County, just north of the Golden Gate Bridge.

RV: This was just before your assignment at Truax?

JK: No. I had just returned from Toul, France, where I was assigned to the 50th Fighter Bomber Group!

RV: You were at Truax Field, in Madison, Wisconsin, for five years? Did you get to go home much?

JK: No. I flew over the area a couple of times, but I didn't get home much; only a short
leave during, Permanent Change of Stations [PCS]!

RV: From Wisconsin, where did you go?

JK: My first marriage terminated at Madison, Wisconsin, and I was transferred to Germany; with the backing of a Brig. General William Wise, whom I performed for, as his Staff Pilot in addition, as a Flight Commander, with the 432\textsuperscript{nd}. FIS.

RV: This was in January of 1957?

JK: Yes. I was assigned to the 440th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, at Erding Air Station, in Munich, Germany. Our mission, was to Intercept & Destroy [If Necessary] hostile aircraft crossing the Iron Curtain, from East to West, into our area. RV: What do you remember most about that tour?

JK: I guess Munich itself, as it is a great city and has some real fine restaurants. The flying was interesting and I met many new friends. I flew the F-86D, which was the All-Weather version of the "Saber!" I was only there approximately five months; as an assignment came up in France.

RV: Which was what?

JK: The 50th Fighter Bomber Group, at Toul Rosiere Air Base in France, needed an additional Flight Commander, so I volunteered! They were flying the F-86H, which was a real bomb and a beautiful bird commander 50th Fighter Bomber Group, at Toul Rosiere Air Base in France. It was powered by a British, Rolls Royce engine. The Group was programmed to transition into the F-100D soon, which was our first century bird and, the primary reason why I transferred from Germany to France! I was at Erding, from January to May of 1957 and settled in at Toul Air Base, at Toul Rosiere, France, in mid-May.

RV: May of 1957?

JK: Right.

RV: You were there for a couple of years?

JK: Yes. I was there for the balance of my European Tour; May of 1957, through October of 1959.

RV: You did flight training and you trained in the F\_100D.

JK: Yes, I flew the F-86H, until it was phased out; and then I transitioned into the F\_100D. We flew down to Tripoli, Libya, frequently to utilize the El Uotia Munitions Range. El Uotia [L-Wah-T-Ah] was one of the finest munition ranges in existence and was available to
all Fighter Units in Europe, to include the UK. It was a 1,200 nautical mile flight down from the
Continent; skirting south along Switzerland and Italy; over the Tyrrhenian/Mediterranean Seas
and on to North Africa. Depending upon the aircraft; it was about a 2 to a 2 1/2 hour flight. Our
pilots would fly down there on an average of twice a year; for a two week stay to accomplish
semi-annual strafing & bombing Requirements, including nuclear! When we transitioned into
the F-100D, my friend Charlie Tubbs and I, flew to Casablanca, Morocco, North Africa, where
we checked out in the F-100, with the 20th FBW. The 20th was stationed in England and had
established a Detachment in Casablanca, to transition their pilots into the F-100, because the
weather was much better in North Africa. As a matter of economy and good sense Charlie and I,
flew down and transitioned with them.

RV: Sir.

JK: Later, Charlie and I, setup our 50th FBG, Detachment at Wheelus Air Base, at
Tripoli, Libya. We had six or eight F-100Ds assigned, and we rotated our pilots down from
France, a few at a time, until all 40, or so, of our pilots were F-100 qualified. I ended up
spending a great deal of time in North Africa. During the six years that I spent in Europe, an
aggregate of approximately 12 months was spent at Wheelus Air Base there at Tripoli,
representing dozens of flights down there; the longest single stay foe six months! During my
tour at Toul, France, I was also the Operations Officer of the 10th Fighter Bomber Squadron;
overseeing a fabulous group of approximately 40 Fighter Pilots.

RV: You were transferred Stateside after that, is that correct?

JK: Yes. Let’s see. I just bought a 300SL, Mercedes Benz, Gull Wing Type and, shipped
it home, for trans-shipment to Hamilton Field, in San Francisco; my next assignment where,
incidentally, I met my future bride Jodi!

RV: Ok, Hamilton Air Force Base, in California. And that's when you met Jodi.

JK: Yes. I was assigned to the 12th Air Force, Inspector General Team there, in October
of 1959. We were tasked to evaluate all USAF National Guard & Reserve units on the west
coast. I had to maintain currency in several aircraft, in order, to fly chase on the several types of
birds on the west coast; to include, the T-33 and all Series of the F-86 and F-100! I met Jodi in
San Francisco in October or November of 1959 and then received orders in December to transfer
to Maxwell AFB, Alabama, to attend the Air Command & Staff College. At this time, we had
only known each other for a few weeks, so we copied one another's addresses. She went to
Hawaii for a year, or so, and I drove off, in my 300SL, to the AC&S College in Montgomery, Alabama.

RV: How was that experience for you there at Maxwell?
JK: At Maxwell, it was real fine. We went into everything, regarding military command, that we could expect in the future. A great deal of speech making and writing; and, subjects of that nature. The fact that I arrived fairly early, there were several weeks, where I flew all over the country before school started. Being a bachelor, they placed my name of the Flight Board, and anytime that any one was scheduled to be flown anywhere, day or night, I received a phone call. I logged several hundreds of hours in the T-33 while there, and it made my day. There were approximately 300 students in my class, and when we graduated, it was back to the Auditorium Bulletin Board, to see where each was to be assigned. This school was a year of duration, and we were captains & majors.

RV: You were a captain by this time.
JK: No. I made major at Hamilton. When I graduated at Maxwell, in June of 1962, I was transferred to Homestead AFB, Florida, in Miami; where I was assigned to the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, as Chief of the Command Post. Jodi had arrived Miami shortly before my arrival. She had preceded me by five or six months. We hadn't specifically planned for such a rendezvous, at that time, it's just the was that it worked out! Actually, Jodi had several cities in mind that she wanted to visit, during her single years and before settling down; including Honolulu, Miami and New York. Of course, as my bride, for the last 10 years of my 30 year military career, she has seen the world. I flew the F-100D again, while at Homestead AFB; and, this was when the Cuban Missile Crisis broke out and it got a bit hairy.

RV: I was going to ask you, you're right down there in the middle of this. What was that experience like for you in October of 1962?
JK: At this point, we had three Fighter Squadrons; the 306th, 307th and 308th Tactical Fighter Squadrons; each with 27 aircraft assigned. However, as the situation worsened in Cuba, the Pentagon tasked five or six of the other Fighter Wings throughout the Country until; we had something like 500 fully armed fighters dispersed on the tremendous parking ramp on the base. Before the crisis in Cuba, Homestead AFB was a Strategic Air Command [SAC] Base, with a Wing of B-52s and KC-135 Tankers, under the Command of Brigadier General Jack Catton; however, within a few days of the Cuban crisis; the USAF predesignated Homestead, a
Tactical Air Command [TAC] Base. General Catton transferred out with his Wing of B-52 Bombers and KC-135 Tankers; and Homestead AFB, became a TAC facility! Our 31st TFW Command Post maintained Flight Scheduling Boards, where we listed the 400, or so, fighters, by tail number and munition loads! The aircrews and maintenance personnel, from the six fighter wings were billeted on base and were ready to go, if called upon. We had a second, Composite Command Post, set up adjacent to ours; commanded by a Major General; through which, the order from the Pentagon, to launch our aircraft against Cuba, would be relayed down to us. Then when President Kennedy, convinced Premier Khrushchev to turn his missile carrying ships around in the Atlantic, the situation in Cuba, dissipated as rapidly, as it had arisen! Overnight, the tactical fighter aircraft, that had been amassed at Homestead AFB, departed in droves, back to their respective bases and our 31st TFW, was back to normal operations.

RV: We're nearing the point, when you're going to be dispatched to Bien Hoa Air Base overseas, but first you've moved in April of 1964 to the United Kingdom from Homestead, Florida. What was your assignment there?

JK: At RAF Wethersfield. Just a note here! During my assignment at Homestead, Jodi and I maintained contact and dated regularly. I lived in a motel in Homestead, Florida, while Jodi had an apartment in Miami, approximately 20 miles north. Then on 15 December 1062, I took one hour off from work during the Cuban crisis and we drove over to the Methodist Church in Homestead city, where we were married.

RV: During the Crisis?

JK: Yes. It took about an hour!

RV: Took an hour off to get married (laughs)?

JK: Yes. Turned around and went back to work. We had been building a house; however, neither of us had talked marriage, at that point. The house was finished, shortly after we married, and we moved in. With the Cuban crisis behind us; I was on Temporary Duty [TDY] in Japan and South Korea, for 90 days, sitting Nuclear Targets in the USSR when I received the word that Jodi and I would be transferring to RAF Wethersfield, near London upon my return from Japan. Jodi's initial response was: "Gee, I don't know if I want to go off and leave our Country!" I said: "Oh come on, many of the women initially feel that way; but you are going to enjoy it!" We jumped off in our 300SL; caught a military transport in Charleston, South Carolina and, within hours, were met at RAF Mildenhall, by some of the Troops from RAF
Wethersfield. I joined the 20th TFW at Wethersfield, and became the Operations Officer, of the 10th TFS. Again our mission was to fly and train, utilizing the El Uotia Range Complex, at Wheelus Air Base in Trioli, Libya, North Africa; and of course, sit alert against Nuclear Targets in the USSR.

RV: Again to North Africa?
JK: Right, flying the F-100D. I was promoted to lieutenant colonel while at Wethersfield, and made Assistant Deputy Commander for Operations of the Wing, under Colonel Peters. After two years at Wethersfield, I was transferred to Frankfurt, Germany, as an Air Liaison Officer, to Lieutenant General G.R. Mather, the Commander of "V" Corps.

RV: At this point, the United States became involved in the Vietnam War; really heavily, in the summer of 1965. What did you think of U.S. Policy, at this point? Were you aware? I'm sure you were, but what were you thinking about?

JK: In Vietnam?
RV: Yes. What the United States was doing in Southeast Asia?
JK: Again, I was pretty busy and flying a great deal. I never did give it too much thought; realizing, that our civil authorities, were on top of the communists interests around the world; and if it came to the application of Military Power versus Diplomatic Means and, the former was required I would prefer the immediate release from my current assignment and transfer to Vietnam! In fact, I volunteered for a consecutive tour from Germany to Vietnam, in May of 1967, and received it! RV: You did think that the war was brewing and you would be there?

JK: Yes. I wanted to get over there.
RV: Even with your new wife, you wanted to get over in the action?
JK: I knew that she would be alone for a year, but it worked Ok!
RV: Yes sir.
JK: At Frankfurt, I ended my assignment as Air Liaison Officer [ALO] in the IG Farben Building, in May of 1967, after one year under General Mather. This was strictly a U.S. Army facility, which housed the 5th Army Corps.
RV: This is May of 1966, when you arrived in Germany?
RV: Did Jodi go with you to Germany?
JK: Yes. She was with me in England, living in base quarters and in Frankfurt we lived in HI_COG Billets, immediately adjacent to my office; which was a diplomat facility. Needless to say, Jodi enjoyed the UK and Europe tremendously and traveled throughout that part of the world, to include Russia and North Africa. From Frankfurt, it was easy to cover Europe from Norway to Switzerland, on three day weekends when flying our Mercedes Benz 300SL on the auto bahns/autostatas, where there wasn't any speed limits! The 300SL could cruise at 120 MPH all day!

RV: How did you get your orders to go to Vietnam? Were you expecting this to happen?
JK: Yes. Let's see. I had volunteered for a consecutive assignment to Vietnam approaching the completion of my tour in Frankfurt and, I received my orders in my office in Frankfurt! The orders originated at Headquarters, 17th Air Force, and were passed down to me by Colonel Binnell, the Senior Air Liaison Officer [ALO], between Headquarters 17th Air Force and Headquarters, 7th Army. My three-year period in Europe had come to an end; and I thought, it was great to be transferring to a combat theater. So, we entered the S.S. United States, with our car and sailed to the east coast in May of 1967. Then Jodi and I drove out to California in our 300SL. I'm trying to think of the base. Then they sent me to Survival School in Washington State.

RV: Spokane?
JK: Spokane.
RV: Fairchild AFB, is that right?
JK: Yes.
RV: Of course.
JK: Jodi stayed in the Bachelor Officer's Quarters [BOQ] on the base and, I went out into the forest and lived on the land for a week or two.
RV: This is in case you're shot down in Vietnam?
JK: Yes. They show you how to eat berries, birds and earthworms and things like that. When finished and 20 pounds lighter, I picked Jodi up and we drove to Tacoma, Washington and the large jump off base there, that services the Far East. McChord Air Force Base.
RV: That's right, McChord Air Force Base.
JK: I met my departure time and, Jodi drove off! She drove the 300SL back down to her folks around L.A. and Bakersfield and then all alone, all the way back to Miami, with no
problems. With the 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing, I spent one year; from May 1967 to May 1968, flying the F-100D there at Bien Hoa!

RV: How was the flight over for you?

JK: Flying over there?

RV: Yes, going to Vietnam, yes sir?

JK: No problem. I'm trying to think! I believe that it was a commercial bird, as they were under contract because of the great numbers of personnel movements. Normally, we'd fly in a USAF, C-141 or C-5. Today it's the C-17. I believe it was a DC-8, or whatever they had at that time.

RV: What was the mood on the plane flying over?

JK: Just like any flight in an airliner I guess! Just like around the States; matter of fact here we go!

RV: How did you feel going back into a war zone?

JK: Fine. We went into Tan Son Nhut, there at the capital. That's where 7th Air Force Headquarters was located, under General Momyer, right in Saigon! At that point, as you leave the aircraft; there is the usual placement of sandbags and obvious military presents no doubt, you are in a combat situation.

RV: What was your impression of Vietnam, when you stepped off of the aircraft?

JK: Just another experience! A little bit like Okinawa, I guess. Someplace that I had never been before. All business, serious! I thought: "Well, let's get on with it!" Bien Hoa, my air base, was just a short hop north, up the road. I jumped into a C-130, for only a 10 minute flight to Bien Hoa. When I was on the deck at Bien Hoa, I don't remember who it was that met me. I probably walked over to Base Ops or looked for the 3rd TFW Headquarters. They knew that I would be arriving, so everything was fine. When I got squared away, I was assigned Assistant to the Deputy Commander for Operations, who is the officer responsible for overseeing the flying activities of all Wing pilots. This was Colonel Coury, Bob Corey, a real fine guy!

Colonel George McLaughlin, was the Wing Commander. In fact, Colonel Catledge, was the wing commander, upon my arrival; followed by Colonel McLaughlin and finally, Colonel Homer Hansen, when I finished my tour a year later. I ended up, with most of my tour, under Colonel McLaughlin. I was the Assistant DCO for a while, waiting to take over the 90th Tactical Fighter Squadron, which included 27 F-100D aircraft and 40 pilots. In the interim, I
lived in tent type quarters and the food was tolerable. My daily activities, included checking the runways and all flight facilities, to ensure safe operations. Then it wasn't long before a friend of mine; Lt. Colonel Bill Haynes, advised that he was taking over the 90th TFS. I was somewhat surprised, as I had been earmarked, to take over the Command of the 90th for quite some time and all that I was waiting for, was for the current Commander to finish his tour. In fact, I had been flying with the 90th in order to get to know the pilots and maintenance crews, which makes for a more comfortable, take over! So when Bill walked up to me, and said: "Did you hear the great news; I'm taking the 90th!" I hadn't heard a thing, up to that point and, I couldn't imagine what had happened, to exclude me as its Commander!

RV: Right. You were expecting that Command.

JK: Yes. I had been busy out running around the runways when Colonel Coury popped the news to Bill Haynes. So, when I finally got back to Coury, he told me: "You've got the 531st." I thought: "Good deal." At least, I've got a squadron, even though, it's not the one that I had been expecting! It turned out, that Col. Coury, under the orders, of Colonel McLaughlin had just fired the second Commander, of the 531st in a very short span of time! One firing was for cause; while the other, there had been very little that, that second Commander could have done to curb his demise! That is, where you begin to experience combat losses; or your aircraft simply do not return! Like the old adage; Where aircraft losses happen in THREES!!!

RV: They blame the Guy at the top. He took responsibility.

JK: Always! When it happens, you get into deep water. The fact, that I had more fighter time and had been assigned to more tactical fighter units, over the years, then most I was assigned the squadron, that was experiencing difficulties!]

RV: Sir. I'd like to ask you a question about overall U.S. Policy at this point. What were you being told of why the United States was in Vietnam?

JK: The big thing I guess, was to contain Communism and unit that Country. Actually there never were any such discussions there, at the combat level, as we were there to halt the Communist after negotiations failed. Of course the President, DOD and Congress form the policies and, we Troops carry them out, when we are told to go!!!

RV: How would you judge the overall morale of the U.S. Troops there that you encountered?

JK: The morale was high within the Troops that I associated; no apparent difference, than
back in the States or Europe.

RV: How many aircraft did you have there with the 531st.

JK: The 531st had 27 aircraft and 40 pilots. That is, 1.5 pilots per aircraft.

RV: These are F-100Ds?

JK: Right. Fighter squadrons are assigned 25 aircraft, plus a couple of spares _ hence 27! In the case of single seat birds; two, are usually tandem configured two-seaters; hence F-100Fs!

RV: What was your daily routine? Did you have daily briefings and then go out and fly all day?

JK: Yes. All missions were individually briefed; usually in flights of four! The main briefings were conducted at the beginning of operations in the early morning and then again in the early afternoon. During these two briefings, everything was covered; such as, all aspects of the weather, any special happenings in the theater, during the past 12 hours and anything else of interest and that should be discussed regarding the operations of the day! Then following these main briefings, the four man flights would break off and conduct their own thorough Flight Briefings from take off to landing! Frag Orders came down to the Wings, from Hdq, 7th AF, during the early morning hours, listing the targets to be struck and munitions to be used. This would give the Munition Load Crews, time to configure the aircraft with the selection of munitions required. Frag Orders listed "Pre-Planned Targets" that the Army commanders requested through the Tactical Air Control Net, during the day before the expected operations. Unexpected targeting; where, emergency requirements would pop up during the day would be handled through the "Immediate Air Strike Request." In this case, airborne flights on missions less critical than this new target, that requires an Immediate Strike; the airborne flight can be diverted from its original target to satisfy the Immediate Request. Also, aircraft setting "5

Minute Standby Alert" at the various Tactical Fighter Wings, can be "Scrambled" to satisfy the Immediate Request! Aside from the above Pre-Planned & Immediate Strike Missions, We would also provide escort protection for such activities, as remote "Support Supply Drops" and "Defoliage Sorties" flown by transport aircraft!

RV: Agent Orange?

JK: Yes. Agent Orange when they would go down, to spray we would provide cover from above and, when they were finished, we would return to base.
RV: Just providing cover for them?

JK: Right.

RV: Did your aircraft ever get hit by ground fire; actually have damage done to it?

JK: I do not know of any hits; even though, it wasn't uncommon to see munitions tracking you! I don't know of any holes in my bird; however, there were many who did receive hits!

RV: From ground fire?

JK: Yes. Ground fire!

RV: These are men under you?

JK: Under me! I didn't lose anyone. But, before I took the Squadron a young Troop went down; and was recovered by Chopper Ok! In his case, it was a Maintenance Problem, where he lost his oil pressure and the engine froze and he bailed out. It was at night and, he was picked up by Chopper in minutes and sustained no injuries!

RV: When you would receive your orders basically from the FACs, and after you had expended your munitions, I imagine you would return immediately to Bien Hoa? Did you ever receive orders to dispense all munitions- no matter what?

JK: Simply to jettison all munitions?

JK: No. In Korea, after we had expended our bombs, rockets and napalm; we still had 1800 rounds of 50 Caliber Ammunition in the nose of the aircraft; which presented a "Weight & Balance" problem, when landing! That is, you had to increase your approach speed; as it was difficult, if not impossible, to hold the nose up when landing possibly ending up in a porpoise [Jack Rabbit] and possible nose gear failure, and more than likely, much more! Because of this, it was essential that the 50 caliber ammunition be expended en route home strafing targets of opportunity! This Weight & Balance issue, wasn't as prominent in the F-100, as it was in the F-80 because of the tremendous weight difference between the two birds. For example, the F-100 weighed approximately 27 tons when fully combat loaded, verus about 1/3 of that for the F_80.

RV: What kind or targets would you strike? Was this up to your discretion or would you go through a FAC to get these targets?

JK: The majority of the strikes, were conducted with a FAC; where he would inform us of our friendlies positions from the enemy; so that our Troops were not placed in jeopardy from friendly fires. Of course, in Korea we were always north of the "Bomb Line," where there were
few FACs, if any, 99% of the time; and, everything was "Free Game," including villages and
anything that moved! In Vietnam, we pretty much expended everything that we carried, while
under the control of a FAC. Immediately following each mission, the FAC would give us a
Battle Damage Assessment [BDA], on the results of our strike, so that we could pass this
information on to the Intelligence Staff, back at base, during our critique! When we asked the
FAC one day; how he could make an accurate BDA regarding KIAs; from the carnage that was
left from the fighters, he responded with: "We count the arms or legs in the trees, and then divide
by 2!" Another tasteless adage, regarding the question of: "How do you determine the Friendly
Vietnamese from the Enemy; especially, when the "Viet Cong," appear friendly during the day,
in their civilian attire; only to don their "Black PJs" at night, and sneak up behind you to stab you
in the back!!! Someone said: "First, you select all of those who you feel are not Viet Cong, or
are friendlies and place them all aboard ships and place them off shore, in the South China Sea;
then, you kill all of the Vietnamese left in Vietnam; and, finally proceed out into the South China
Sea and sink all of the ships!" Not very nice, is it?

RV: Really? How soon after your strike does the FAC pass you your BDA?
JK: The FAC would advise, "Standby a couple of minutes" and he would fly down to
establish the BDA, while we made a single obit observing what we could, before heading out for
Bien Hoa. I don't know how true it was regarding, establishing the BDA, by counting the legs in
the trees and dividing by two, but I never got that LOW or SLOW!

RV: I guess that works.
JK: Something like that. I guess that's a mess. That's one thing with a pilot, you don't
see that gore, like the army troops do, unless you get shot down, or visit the Army Troops in the
field!

RV: That's what I wanted to ask you about. You never saw really the results, first hand,
of the bombing and everything?
JK: No. I didn't witness any of the carnage, first hand, however occasionally one of our
Troops would be returned to us, via Army Chopper, after being extracted from a crash site!
RV: I'm sorry.
JK: I have to pause a moment.
RV: Go ahead sir.
JK: We were usually spared of that. I visited the BIG RED "1," First Infantry Division
one time. They were near us and we exchanged, overnight visits. RV: They were stationed
what? Just north of you?

JK: Yes. They were a little northwest of us. They were established in an old French
Rubber Plantation. We us to exchange visits. Their senior officers would drop in on us in a
chopper, for the day and, we would place them in the back seat of one of the two seater, F-100Fs
and fly them on a combat mission. Then, they would return the favor, by dropping in on us with
a chopper, and flying one of us over to their encampment for the night. We would spend the
night on a cot and the next morning, the Unit Commander would take us out into the
undergrowth, to count the VC dead as, a result of the previous nights operations. This was
interesting!

RV: They'd actually walk you out at night?

JK: No. We would spend the night in their battle weary digs; then, the following
morning, we would walk out into the undergrowth to observe the carnage! Several hundreds of
our Troops, were simply scattered around the area, engaged in such things as shaving in the sun,
eating "C" Rations and some stretched out, catching up on their sleep, from the previous nights
skirmishes! There was always a perimeter established protected by armed Troops positioned
approximately 100 feet apart, armed with machine guns and other terrifying weapons! I
remember, the Army colonel, that I visited last, asked me what I was carrying just before we
proceeded down into the underbrush. I was in my flying suit and jump boots. I said: "I have my
.38 Smith & Wesson!" He laughed and said: "Don't worry about that!" He handed me two hand
grenades and said, hang on to these and if you see or hear anything, toss them in that direction!

RV: On the ground or in the helicopter?

JK: Yes. We were on the ground, getting ready to slip down into the brush. There
wasn't any problem identifying our Troops, as they were out in the open, in their military gear,
with their M-16 Rifles and Machine Guns! The trees around the perimeter were also laced with
Claymore Mines, which required that everyone, knew just which exits and entries surrounding
the encampment were safe. While down in the undergrowth, it was a matter of counting the dead
enemy bodies, while exercising caution, in the event any of the bodies were booby trapped.

RV: Why did the colonel want to show you those bodies, do you think?

JK: Simply, to show us their daily activities, I guess! Body Count, was an important
Intelligence Item! Actually, if the enemy had time and were not under fire, they would remove
as many bodies as possible. During these visits, when the Army would pick us up in their
chopper it, was never more than one of us per visit! And when they would visit us, it was the
same situation, just one of them as, everyone was always very busy and it was a serious and
professional indoctrination! None of the senior Army officers, who visited us, cared for a second
ride in the F-100F; as, if one is not accustomed to diving at the earth at speeds up to 500 knots
and screaming back up, off of the target, pulling "Gs" that will put one asleep it could be
demoralizing to a non pilot!

RV: Really? That was enough for them?

JK: Yes. For example, when you launch on the average fighter combat mission,
everything is happening very rapidly, and you must stay way ahead of everything that is
happening, or you will "Fall Behind the Power Curve," as they say and, everything can fall apart!
You join your flight of three shortly after take off and, your aircraft are loaded to the maximum,
with everything but the "Proverbial Kitchen Sink" hanging on bomb shackles beneath the wings.
From departure to recovery you must know where the outgoing, friendly artillery channels are
and, avoid those areas, or you could be hit by friendly shells. As you are leaving the immediate
area, you must contact your FAC by radio and then pick him up visually as you head for your
rendezvous point. By the time the FAC is giving you your target information, you have all
munition safety switches hot and the three of you are in trail formation, circling the target 120
degrees apart in a 360 degree Luftbury Turn [Circle]! When cleared to fire, the pilots
individually dive on the target, in trail, bombing and strafing; pass after pass, diving and
zooming back up until all munitions have been expended! At this point, the pilots join in close
formation turn all munition switches off, copy the BDA from the FAC and take up a safe route
home, staying clear of all out coming friendly artillery. If you had an Army officer or a "Visiting
Fireman" in the back seat, you might check to see if he/she is still healthy and hasn't thrown up!
The person in the rear seat, usually doesn't care for seconds!

RV: When you were on the ground, there with the Ground Troops, how did they treat
you? How were you received?

JK: Very fine! Any of the Army Troops, who have called for "Air Cover" when their
backs are up against the wall, swear by the "Fly Boys" when they witness, what they can do.
And of course, they knew that we were stationed right next door to them, and we were always
eager to support them day or night! Of course, they were not under fire during my visits and you
would never know that there was a war on, as they basked in the sun and took time to shave!
The surroundings were very austere, as could be expected as we were in a war zone and
everything was in shambles; however, you would be surprised at what one can become
accustomed to during wars!

RV: Would you say that the morale was pretty good?
JK: I never heard of any problems within the USAF structure, through which I
functioned; however, I had very little contact with the Army Officers and Troops. The first time
that I heard a word on possible drug use, by the Troops in Vietnam, was after I returned home
and turned on the TV!

RV: So you didn't see a lot of alcohol or drug use?
JK: Not in the least! We had an austere Officer's Club and a mini-bar in the Squadron, in
the event anyone should like a sip! As you probably know; during WWII and Korea, there was a
policy that authorized "1 Ounce" of "Mission Whiskey" for each mission that a pilot flew;
however, I don't believe that the policy was any longer in effect, after Korea, as I never heard
anything more about it.

RV: So you guys were squared away?
JK: Yes. We just completed our year and missions from approximately 150 to 250;
depending upon one's position.

RV: I was going to ask you about the rocket attacks on Bien Hoa Air Base! Is that pretty
much, besides being shot at a few times in the air, the extent of enemy fire that you came under?
JK: Yes. The VC launched Russian, 122mm Rockets at the base, about five times per
week; usually, between the hours of 23:00 in the evening, to 04:00 in the morning which
interrupted one's sleep considerably. It was very difficult to sleep through such an attack, as
when these rockets would explode it was like a thunderclap beneath your bed! They were simply
placed in an open field; eyeball aligned longitudinally and elevated to a degree that the VC felt,
would place the rockets on the base and, then they would launch them in volleys of six to 12.

RV: Did you ever see anyone killed by these rockets?
JK: No. One of the rockets hit the ground, about six to eight feet, from one of our pilots
as he was stepping into our Personnel Equipment Tent to hang up his parachute and flying
equipment, following a night mission. Fortunately, it didn't hit the concrete, but hit in the earth
between the ramp and the tent. This allowed the rocket to bury a degree in the soft soil, with the
explosion erupting upwards, blowing the pilot off of his feet, but he was basically uninjured.

Had the rocket, hit on the concrete, it would have sent out thousands of pieces of shrapnel, horizontally throughout a 360 degree arc no doubt, shredding the pilot! One of our maintenance Troops, stuck his head out of the bunker, during a lull in an attack and he picked up a piece of shrapnel in his neck, when the last rocket wet off!

RV: How often would these rocket attacks occur?

JK: During the last few months, we were hit four to five times a week!

RV: That's pretty often. You were there during the Tet Offensive.

JK: Yes. I was inbound to the base. I was away that night. I had come in that morning after things had settled down. I think I hear my TV man at the door. Can you hold on?

RV: This is Richard Verrone and, I am continuing my Oral History Interview with Colonel Jack Keith. It is 09:00 AM, CST, October 25th, Friday morning. Colonel Keith we left off yesterday, as we were just starting to discuss the Tet Offensive and your experience with that. You said when the Offensive began, you were inbound, back to Bien Hoa, is that right?

JK: Yes. I had gone to the States to see my wife and I returned Tet morning, after things had settled down a bit. All Troops, had a chance to visit their wives one time, during their year in Vietnam. Most met their wife in Hawaii; however, I was able to make it all the way Stateside! I've got to get rid of my little Puppy here just a minute! I hopped a ride in a C-130 from Tan Son Nhut Air Base, when I arrived back in country, for the short flight back to Bien Hoa when I smelled the "Tell Tale" smell of death. I then realized, that this was a mortuary bird. The VC sustained something like 70 KIAs and 24 injured, on Bien Hoa during Tet, while the US was pretty much unscathed. I covered a bit of Tet in my Memoirs!

RV: Yes sir. What kind of activities did you have there at Bien Hoa?

JK: We had the 3rd Tactical Fighter Wind, with its three Tactical Fighter Squadrons there, with F-100D/Fs. Plus, we had a Detachment of Air-to-Air, F-102, Air Defense birds; from the 405th TFW in the Philippines. There were approximately six F-102s, positioned on several of the bases in South Vietnam!

RV: During the Tet attack, was any of your equipment damaged? Any of the birds damaged?

JK: I don't believe there was any substantial damage, probably a few bullet holes around and some soiled underwear! We always had the Army Troops on our perimeter and they took
the brunt of the skirmish. We experienced much more damage from nightly rocket attacks, than we did during Tet; in fact, I would say from a single rocket attack than from Tet!

RV: Did you increase your number of sorties during the day after Tet?
JK: No. I don't believe so; in fact, I didn't notice any change at all after Tet!

RV: What could you tell about the overall American policy? This is 1968 going into 1969; did you feel like the United States was winning the war, or making progress? Or were you pretty much separated from the political atmosphere?

JK: I didn't see any changes, or hear of any concern at all there in Vietnam, regarding US policies in the area and, I felt that we were containing the North Vietnamese. In fact, I was pretty much unaware of any opposition from the college students, and the like as, we were all pretty busy doing our job and hopping to stay alive!

RV: What can you say about the media coverage of the war? Were you exposed a lot to the press, as Commander of the 531st?

JK: I don't recall any Press Folks; other than the fact, that I flew a couple of civilians in the back seat of an F-100F! They didn't ask me anything and I don't remember why they had been Ok’d to fly a combat mission with us. I would imagine, that they had something to do with the media! One of my main concerns, was that they didn't get sick before we landed! Ted Kennedy popped in one day, in a chopper, and was dropped off at the base of the Control Tower while I was reconnoitering the runway perimeter in a Jeep; however, before I could get around to picking him up another vehicle showed and picked him up.

RV: You never got to meet him and talk to him?
JK: No. I dropped him a letter in Washingon a few years ago, referring to the incident; however, he never responded.

RV: You actually took a couple of members of the press up on one of your sorties? That's interesting. Who gave the orders for that? I guess that came from above?

JK: It probably came out of 7th Air Force Hdq! They usually arrive the Wing, with written orders, which they present to the Wing Commander (CC) and, then he selects the jock to give them a ride or, the CC will direct his Deputy Commander of Operations (DCO) to select the jock! The DCO would usually ask me, if I would mind taking someone up in the backseat of an "F," and _ I would always advise, that I would be pleased to do so! One day, the passenger _ happened to be General Momyer, the Commander of 7th Air Force!

RV: That's exactly what I wanted to ask you. You had General Momyer on one of your
runs. Tell me about the experience, what was that like?

JK: On this flight, the DCO asked me again, if I would mind taking the CG up on a
mission in the "F," and I said, not at all! As a convenience, we briefed in the Alert Pad, where
our "5 Minute Birds are on Alert," so as to have a bit more privacy than in the Squadron Briefing
Room in our Operations Shack. His Ops Troops, at Hdq, 7th AF had selected our target, and as
we briefed for a flight of three he simply sat off to one side, seemingly not too interested in the
sticky details! Myself on the other hand, I imagine that it was more like you folks sitting down
for your "State Boards!" Immediately upon the completion of our briefing, we climbed aboard
our aircraft and screamed off, northwest through a gag gal of airborne operations, avoiding
everything in our path to include, our own US Army outbound artillery; we called for our FAC.
We had no more then contacted the FAC and were smoking towards the target; when the 7th AF
Command Post, came on the air and, advised: "We have a different target for you!"
RV: Is that because they were trying to find a really good one for him?
JK: That's right! We had no more then proceeded half way to our original target
coordinates, before we received the call from the General's CP, to alter our course towards
another set of coordinates; to change our radio frequencies and to contact a second FAC. At this
point, the General hadn't said a word; however, then his Command Post Troops, came on the air
again, and advised us to take up another heading to a third set of coordinates; to change our radio
frequencies and to contact a third FAC! At this point, he simply laughed a bit and commented
over the intercom system: "It's becoming very difficult to fine good targets these days!" We
went on to the third target, that we successfully bombed and strafed. RV: Do you remember
what target that was sir?
JK: No. I surely don't!
RV: He had commented to the Wing Commander and you didn't know about it; that he
hoped that you were not the type of pilot, that performed these killing maneuvers; including
steep dives and screaming pull outs, pulling excessive "Gs" that can put a person to sleep
everything, that he was terribly unfond of!
JK: Yes. I always used a nice 30 degree dive angle; regardless of what I was delivering
Bombs, Rockets, Napalm or 20mm Cannon Fire, at an average speed around 500 Knots. One
reason by remaining constant, you get very proficient and your accuracy can be astounding! The
bottom line, it appeared that the General was thrilled to no end, as he provided us with a nice
letter, shortly after the mission. When we landed back at Bien Hoa AB, he was met by the News Media who took pictures of him which I believe ended up in Time Magazine.

RV: His photo there on the runway?

JK: He was just standing beside our aircraft, where it was parked on the ramp! There were a dozen, or so, News Media types standing around him no doubt, a few Military PR personnel. In General Momyers 15 March 1968 letter, commending us for handling of the mission, he simply indicated, that it was a good mission and that we functioned in a manner, that he expected. I have a copy of his letter in my Memoirs!

RV: Right, I read it.

JK: Did you?

RV: Yes sir. How much talk on the radio, was there when you were flying out to the targets? What were your Guys talking about, if at all?

JK: En route to targets, radio chatter is held to the minimum; where the Flight Leader talks with the FAC and other controllers, covering only what it takes to perform the mission. The wingmen listen to everything that is said; and, if there is something that they must add they simply do so! On our mission with General Momyer aboard, the only thing he said was his remark regarding the difficulty finding good targets; and, that did not go out over the air as, it was an intercom remark!

RV: Were you usually the Flight Leader?

JK: Yes. Normally, because I was the senior man; or even when the Wing Commander, or any other Senior individual was in my flight, I led and, in most cases, anyone senior to me was more than willing to have you in the lead as I flew daily and ate and slept the combat routine and, they did not! I've seen things happen so fast in the air, that some young wingmen find it more comfortable to nail on to the tail of Flight Commander and follow his lead! As you probably know, there are usually four or five Senior Pilots, on Special Orders, in a Fighter Squadron, officially designated as Flight Commanders and, the balance of the 40, or so, pilots in the squadron, are divided up equally under the Flight Commanders. Also, the Flight Commanders, flew with their Troops everyday and when his pilots reached a high degree of proficiency and he felt that they were Flight Lead Qualified, he would have Special Orders cut, to indicate so! In this way, eventually most of the pilots, had a chance to lead flights. In Vietnam, we usually took off in two to four bird flights; while in Korea we launched with as many as 50 or more aircraft
in mass, which included most of the available aircraft in each of the three squadrons! In South Vietnam, because of the nature of the targets, there was no need for huge gaggles; as the basic two to four ship flights, were adequate to cover a target. If it was a matter, of extended coverage, against a specific target you simply scheduled flight after flight on a time separated schedule!

RV: Did you ever go off alone?

JK: In a single bird?

RV: Yes sir!

JK: No. I did not! I made a couple of single bird flights to our Maintenance Depot in Taiwan, China. In this case, with no ammunition.

RV: In China, or in Taiwan?

JK: Yes. Taiwan, China. We would fly over and leave our aircraft for major maintenance and then return to Bien Hoa by a military aircraft courier. Other than that, there were never any single ship operations.

RV: I'm sure you learned your bombing and strafing tactics and maneuvers, while you were in flight training?

JK: Yes. We underwent considerable bombing and strafing work, to include air to air firing against leave targets towed behind target aircraft, during our initial flight training; however, the serious training and hands on operations came when assigned to tactical units, where all of these types of things, become second nature as you are involved with it all every day!!! Also, each pilot must meet semi-annual flight requirements, which requires regularly scheduled TDY visits to the various USAF Munition Ranges around the world. In fact, there is a running competition within the USAF, where pilots are pit against one another, during Organized Shoot Outs to see who are the "Top Guns!"

RV: How difficult was it for you to develop these tactics? I guess by the time that you were in Vietnam you were fairly proficient at this?

JK: Actually, in my case, I had been in Tactical Fighter units all my adult life and, all that I did was fly and train in anticipation of combat. When a new weapon was introduced it was simply a matter of studying the weapon and then going out on a Munitions Range and firing it! It was the same situation, regarding transitioning from one specific fighter to another, when your unit would upgrade into a new aircraft. All that it required, was to read the Pilot's Operating Manual and, then go out and fly the aircraft to become familiar with everything in that bird that
wasn’t available in your previous bird! The old adage: "Once you have mastered the bicycle, you will never experience any problems with it, for the rest of your life;" also, is the case, regarding the fighter business and tactics! Second nature, so to speak!

RV: When you were out on a sortie and were approaching a target, you could see the truck or whatever it was you were going for, the bridge, you could see it in your sights coming up?

JK: Yes. In South Vietnam, the majority of the time, we struck obscured targets in the undergrowth, where all that we would see was the FACs Target Marking, White Phosphorus Rocket, smoke column. He would launch his White Phosphorus [Willie Pete] Rocket and then instruct us where to place our munitions, in respect to the white smoke column!

RV: I guess your computers onboard helped in your targeting? Is that correct?

JK: The F-100 didn't possess any Gun Sight Computing Equipment; we simply had the standard Gun Sight; where you put the "pipper" on the aiming point where you felt it would hit the target. That is, when strafing with your four 20mm cannons, you can pretty much place your pipper directly on your target possibly, adjusting slightly for the wind while, releasing bombs, napalm and rockets, the wind is a bit more critical, because of the slower speed of these projectiles!

RV: How did you gauge the winds? Was that done?

JK: Our Meteorologists would cover the weather conditions several times each day in their Weather Briefings. Wind conditions were also posted on the Briefing Boards and constantly upgraded for our continuous perusal. Also if there happened to be any kind of a fire in the area, you could observe the smoke! I remember one time, where the weatherman gave us a wind from a certain direction and speed; and, as I dove on the target, at my usual 30 degree angle and 500 knots and released my bomb; as I watched it flying towards the target like a football I could see that it was going to hit short by approximately 100 yards! At that I swung around and put the pipper a tad higher on the target and released the second 500-pounder and it hit a bit closer! I'm sure, that it wasn't only a bad call, regarding the wind but, perhaps the target elevation was higher than briefed.

RV: You could actually see the bombs hit?

JK: Yes.

RV: When you pitched the bomb, would you actually go out kind of in front of it?
JK: No. When I would release a bomb at a 30 degree dive angle and 500 knots airspeed, approximately two miles from the target; I would pull up slightly to the left; then drop the right wing and watch the bomb hurdling toward the target. In Korea one day, I release a 1,000 pound bomb and watched it go, and when it hit the ground; it enter the ground at a very slight angle and broke back up through the surface and skipped a considerable distance, like a flat stone on the water, before it exploded!

RV: Really?

JK: Yes.

RV: Wow!

JK: They would penetrate the surface a bit; then clear the surface and skip or tumble and finally explode, when the fuse took effect! It was really weird, watching a thousand pound bomb skipping in and over the surface, like a flat stone over the water surface!

RV: Yes sir. I bet so. How accurate would you say the bombing was that you Guys were doing?

JK: I would say, that our bombing was very accurate, as we were at it every day; for something like 150 to 250 sorties each in a one year tour! One young Air Force Academy Grad, volunteered to extend his tour to two years and, in his case he flew 500 missions! When flying so frequently, you become very good at what you are doing and can pretty much tell just where each bomb that you release is going to hit! When we bombed at night from 20,000 feet, in flights of three, under the control of the Strategic Facilities; we dropped on their command and, of course, it was impossible to witness our results; as we were simply interrupting possible troop and supply movements along the enemy supply routes below; in some cases where you couldn't see the ground because of inclement weather! During our every day operations, I do not recall one time, where a FAC, wasn't pleased when we finished our bomb runs; as he was determining our BDA!

RV: Right. One of the big debating points that historians and veterans of the war dwelled upon, since the war has been about strategic bombing and the effectiveness of strategic bombing in ground support and how it affects overall diplomacy and Foreign Policy. What is your opinion of that? Do you think that strategic bombing makes a difference in the outcome of a war like Vietnam, where it was kind of semi-conventional at times and then a lot of guerilla warfare most of the time?
JK: You're probably talking, primarily SAC drops. Strategic blanket bombing?

RV: That and, I guess you were taking out targets in ground support and things like that?

JK: Yes. Like I have said normally we would carry two 500; 750 or 1,000 pound bombs on each F-100 Fighter; while some of the other fighters, through the use of "Christmas Tree" bomb shackles could carry an unbelievable configuration of bombs! In the case of the daily fighter bombing operations, in South Vietnam, where we would deliver six bombs in a flight of three; followed by an endless string of three ship flights we were able to rain bombs on a given area almost indefinitely. Of course, the B-52s carried an unbelievable load of bombs; that took several seconds to release the entire string to where the bombs were still coming out of their bomb bays, while the first part of the string was hitting the ground! If you have ever witnessed such destructive operations, you must know how demoralizing strategic blanket bombing can be! I remember, where the SAC bombing in North Vietnam, was very effective; however, about the time, that we might expect the enemy to capitulate the bombing was halted because of the humanitarian influence; primarily from the US. Strategic bombing in North Vietnam, was so effective, that some of our former POWs, after they were liberated indicated that the North Vietnamese guards, underwent a complete transformation of character, during these mass bombing phases, where they felt the end was near, and they became very friendly and asked the POWs to remember them as humane, friendly guards, upon the termination of the war, so they would not be handled harshly by the Americans, or tried as war criminals.

RV: Interesting!

JK: That's about it regarding the bombing!

RV: Speaking of the POWs there, what kind of POW training did you have? I know they sent you to Survival School, at Fairchild AFB, in Spokane, Washington. Did they cover what would happen if you were shot down? I know you operated mainly in the South. But if you feel into enemy hands, what kind of training did you have for that?

JK: At the POW Survival School at Fairchild AFB, we were involved primarily, with living off of the land and, if you didn't eat you became hungry to the point where you would eat almost anything! At the Jungle Survival School, in the Philippines; they had a makeshift prison, where we were placed under guard and harassed regularly throughout all hours of the night by bullies, that could do just about anything but torture you. A lot of yelling and carrying on, and night work, that included, drenching you in water and pouring it down your throat.
RV: How long did that training last?

JK: That was probably about a week! Then they put us out in the countryside, or jungle-like area. We were introduced to such things, as what they called the "Water Tree," a huge tree, that when simply taped like a Maple Tree, would put forth up to 20 or 30 gallons of water overnight. Enough water to last several people a week. In order to catch the water, it was necessary to strap a tarp around the tree, just below the tapped spot! We ended up the Jungle Survival period, when we were turned loose in pairs; and in my case three of us into the jungle! We were given a 30 minute head start, out into the wilderness, before they turned loose many small Filipino Negritos, who were instructed to hunt us down during the night. We all carried a small silver "chit," which we were to give to the Negrito who captured us; for which they would receive a pound of rice for each chit! I found a small hill and climbed up into the underbrush for the night, with the mice and rats to keep me company. I could hear the little Negritos all around me, but I remained quiet and I was never discovered. The fact that there were three of us in my original team; when they found one, they must have surmised that there was only one left and, when they found number two, they eventually drifted off into the night and I was free.

RV: How much did you think about that while you were flying?

JK: About POW?

RV: Yes sir!

JK: I don't recall really thinking about it at all. If we were knocked down in the South, we would end up in Hanoi too, unless the VC captured us and decided to make us pay for that day's carnage and were intent upon torturing or killing us in the South! If they turned us over to the NVA, we would no doubt, have a suite at the Hanoi Hilton, along with many of my friends! I don't know why, I never had butterflies during my flying in Vietnam; while this was a daily phenomenon in Korea; however, the butterflies were gone after becoming airborne.

RV: Did you ever witness any B-52 strikes from the air or ground?

JK: Not in combat; however Yes, during demonstrations in the States and, you cannot imagine such an earth shattering experience! I believe that it's the B-1, or B-2 that carries 84 each, 500 pound bombs.

RV: Yes.

JK: I flew in a SAC B-52 once, on a 25-hour, round trip, non-stop, mid-air refueled sojourn from the States to Spain and return, simply to log my four hour monthly minimum for
pay, why on TDY away from base.

RV: How much bombing did you do, if any, on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia?

JK: The Wings were tasked for "Sky Spot" operations; which required that one Squadron within a Wing, would stand down during the day, and then fly all night for a week! The entire squadron's force would be equipped with two 500 pound bombs and then launched in flights of three; under control of SAC radar personnel. They would control us to 20,000 feet and then align us down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and we would drop on their command. We had a small gauge in the cockpit, called a Rosette, that gave us slight corrections when we were on the bomb run; that would indicate Fly Right "1' degree, or Fly Left "2" degrees, etc., etc. until SAC would call "20 Seconds" to drop and, when the Rosette indicated "Bombs Away" we would hit the bomb button! The 531st TFS took our Wing's entire commitment for a month; so that the other two squadrons were relieved of the commitment for a period, which elevated the need for the other two squadrons to reconfigure their aircraft for this Special Operation! The typical results of "Sky Spot" Operations, are contained on Page 60a1, of my Memoirs!

RV: Right. How effective do you think the bombing on the Ho Chi Minh Trail was overall for the United States?

JK: I have no way of knowing; however, I'm certainly thankful that I wasn't anywhere near that area, during such operations. The bombs are also fitted with delayed fuses, set to explode anywhere from contact to hours or days after release which makes it very difficult for those repairing the damage as, explosions can occur around the clock with absolutely no warning!

RV: That's got to be very disconcerting, I would imagine. Did you ever have any contact with ARVN or the indigenous forces in South Vietnam?

JK: No I never did. They were around and we supported them at times; however, our contact was only with the FAC. The ARVN, like our own Troops; passed their Strike Requests up through the Tactical Air Control Center [TACC] at Tan Son Nhut, but I do not recall, any special instructions that would indicate just who we were supporting!

RV: You said that you followed or provided cover for some of the defoliant spraying?

JK: Right.

RV: Did you ever have any contact with the actual defoliant; Agent Orange or anything else that you are aware of?
JK: You mean actually entering the cockpit?

RV: Yes sir. Any type of exposure.

JK: I never had any problem with the Agent Orange, as we simply remained well above the spray birds and observed from a safe separation; however, if they advised that they were being fired upon, we would have instantly been all over the bad guys with our four 20mm cannons. I might add here that concentrated 20mm cannon fire is almost as effective as Agent Orange, for clearing forests; however, hideously more demoralizing! God awfully, skin crawling noisy!!! The only problem that I experienced regarding cockpit contamination, was when a small friendly fighter, pulled up beside me in the take off position on the runway, and he inadvertently dropped a tear gas grenade from beneath his wing and we got caught in a cloud of tear gas, which burns your eyes, to the point where it is impossible to hold them open. By flipping your oxygen system to 100% there wasn't any problem breathing; it was just a matter of waiting until you could open your eyes!

RV: Did you have any other R&Rs? You said that you went to the States to see Jodi once and to Australia once. Did you take any other R&Rs on your tour?

JK: No. That was about it. I spent a few days in Sidney, Australia and then that week or two in the States to see my wife. I ferried an F-100 to Taiwan a couple of times; and finally I spent a few days in Bangkok, Thailand, when invited to accompany Lt. Colonel McBride, Commander of the 510th TFS, when we flew over to visit his wife! I've got to wait just a second.

RV: Ok. Go ahead sir!

JK: When you are overseas in a combat situation; R&Rs just don't mean that much, as you can become bored very easy and you miss what you have been doing; and you can't wait to get back into the fray!

RV: Was that the mood basically of a lot of the men you served there with?

JK: I kind of think so, whether they would say anything or not! Lt. Colonel McBride, was the only one that I know of who flew his wife over to Bangkok. She lived in a very attractive condo that looked just like those in the States. There were also some very fine restaurants in Bangkok; however, I couldn't wait to get back to Bien Hoa after my short visit there!

RV: How much were you able to keep contact, or keep up to date, with news in the
United States? Did you have a TV in the barracks or were you able to keep up with what was happening back Stateside?

JK: No TVs or radios! I believe that the "Stars & Stripes Newspaper," was about all that we had! In fact, we were all so busy, we didn't hear much of anything regarding protests against the war and, didn't care that much anyway! Just a note here: As you know, there are several components of the USAF; they are [1] The Regular Troops [Career Types] [2] The Extended Active Duty [EAD] Reserve Types, also [Career Types] however; for some reason they just never were offered a Regular Commission; and, when things become austere, they are the first Troops that will be released; [3] The Inactive Reserve Types, who are civilians, who attend Weekend Training Periods to obtain credits towards retirement at age 60; they must accrue at least 20 years, Active or Inactive, by age 60 to retire and draw pay; [4] The Air National Guard, is similar to the USAF Inactive Reserve and must attend weekend functions and accrue a minimum of 20 years prior to age 60! Active duty personnel, received 2 and 1/2% of their Base Pay for each year of service, for their highest rank attained; non-active duty personnel, i.e., Inactive Reserve and National Guard personnel, receive 1/2% of their Base Pay/Earned Year. Of course, for any year, that any of us spend on active duty; all receive 2 and 1/2% of our Base Pay. And what I want to add the regular or career troops aren't too concerned when the folks back home, flash their banners and parade up and down the streets, as we have been trained to fight, when called upon, by our Civil Authorities and we have taken an oath to press forth to our grave, if that is what it takes! Finally it is very disturbing to the career types, to hear the folks back home say; please send our loved ones home and away from "Danger" & "Harms Way," when that is precisely what we have trained and thrive for!

RV: How did those anti-war protests affect you guys back in Vietnam?

JK: Not in the least! We were too busy fulfilling tremendous maintenance and flying schedules, day and night, and anticipating enemy rocket attacks throughout the hours of darkness. What was happening in the outside world, really didn't mean an awful lot to us!

RV: Were you ever able to attend any USO Shows?

JK: No. I never did! That was funny. Including Korea and Vietnam, I never saw a show nor WWII either! Jack Benney walked into our mess in Korea one afternoon from a show that he had put on somewhere. There were only two of us sitting in the mess following the late mission, when Jack Benney and several of his companions walked in. He simply said: "Hi
Fellas" and they say down for a meal. In Vietnam, once in awhile a Congressman or actor would pop by; Ted Kennedy for one and Fess Parker, the actor who played Daniel Boone in the TV series.

RV: Fess Parker, was that his name?
JK: Yes. I recognized him as he stepped into the Alert Pad. We chatted for a little bit and he looked a little uncomfortable.
RV: He looked a little uncomfortable?
JK: Yes. They usually come in with some kind of jumpsuit or fatigue type uniform. Of course, it is very hot and humid over there. He sat around for a short time chatting with some of the pilots and gave one of the pilots, three autographs for his three boys.
RV: Sir, let me pause for just a second, as I am almost out of time on this disk. You described in your Memoirs, a little bit of life on the base there at Bien Hoa, can you describe that? What was it like there everyday?
JK: Yes. When I arrived, I ran into several old friends while I was getting settled in billets; which was a tent, that I lived in for several weeks. The quarters were rectangular shaped tents, similar to those utilized by the Boy Scouts; wooden floors and canvas sides running halfway up the sides, with mosquito netting, attached at that halfway point and continuing up to the roof.
RV: Mosquito netting?
JK: Yes. It was actually screen. Mosquito screening. Then the roof was either canvas or wood covered with a corrugated metal. Each tent housed from six to eight pilots in individual bunks with mosquito netting to protect you against the anopheles mosquito, which transmit malaria to man! I am sure that the python snake would experience difficulty also getting past a well tucked in netting! Of course, a few weeks later, when I took over the 531st TFS, I was assigned a very nice small house trailer. The trailer was fine and had just what a lone pilot would require; a bed, a lamp to read by and a small bathroom, where you could shower and shave. Of course, it was far from bullet proof; however, neither was the tent! All billets, had a "Bomb Shelter" readily available! We had an Officer's Mess that I can't remember too much about. Our Officer's Club wasn't bad and offered an occasional singer and accompaniment. There was a picture on the bulletin board in the Club; with a buxom blonde sitting on an old friend's lap so, I imagine that she was presented at the Club before my arrival. She was the gal
who died in an auto accident not long after that picture was taken.

RV: Yes sir! I remember, I just can't think of the name right off.

JK: Her name was Jane Mansfield! I don't remember too much about the Club, because I was always busy. The man on her lap was a William, something or other he was a full bird and Deputy Wing Commander here at Homestead AFB, with the 31st TFW, during the Cuban crisis, when I was a major, in charge of the Command Post. He was a funny little guy; about 5'5" with a belly, like the Chinese Pot Belly Pig! He and this Mansfield, made quite a picture, with both of them sitting there grinning like Cheshire cats! We had a small AFEX, where we could obtain toilet articles and the like. There were also four or five native barbers at the AFEX. They had manual clippers with long handles, where they would hold one handle in one hand and take the other handle in the other hand and shear you like you would clip a hedge!

RV: Yes sir (laughs).

JK: Everything was very austere on Bien Hoa AB; which included a few hangars and administrative buildings, housing the various support agencies on base. Nothing at all like the USAF bases in the States. There was a fair AFEX in Saigon that took approximately 15 minutes in a staff car, if there weren't any firefighters going on between Bien Hoa and Saigon! Then, of course, there were many potholes around the base from rocket attacks! There were always many United States contract, construction crews, on the base repairing potholes and maintaining runways and taxiways.

RV: These were civilian contractors from the United States?

JK: Yes. There are civilian contractors throughout the world; including the Pacific isles, who are responsible for maintaining US military facilities. The names of the various contractors are obviously posted, in their areas of responsibility, throughout the many areas of the world!

RV: Did you guys have any pets on base?

JK: We had a python named "Ramrod!"

RV: Tell me about that.

JK: We would see dogs about; however, they were a problem around the runway, and the Air Policemen were responsible for running them off! I love dogs as pets. We have a little female Yorkie here!

RV: I saw the picture you attached!

JK: You did?
RV: Yes sir!

JK: The area dogs, were pretty skiddish and it was impossible to pet them. The MPs would monitor the area in pick up type vehicles and shoot the dogs with shotguns, which bothered me very much! Then when I took over the 531st TFS, I was introduced to "Ramrod," our python. He was named after our squadrons call sign! We kept him in our Squadron Operations building, on the flight line. He just made himself at home and slipped around where ever he wished! He startled more then a few visitors, when he would drop down from the rafters above and look them in the eyes!

RV: Where did they acquire this snake?

JK: I'm not sure; however, they are very plentiful there GE in SEA!

RV: Did you see a lot of them out there?

JK: Not really; however, when Ramrod died of a sunstroke the US Army Troops who monitored our perimeter inundated us with many snakes, when they heard of Ramrods death! They would catch large ones, up to 25 or 30 feet, weighing upwards of 150 pounds and, place each in a large metal trash can and drop them off at our Operations Building! However, we never did find another snake like Ramrod; as he had a pleasant disposition, while some of the larger specimens were cranky and were prone to slither away, rather than to take up residence in our Ops Building! Ramrod usually curled up in a corner and would sometimes, not move for hours! RV: He had free reign of the building?

JK: Yes. He just simply moved about where ever and when ever he wished. We had a mesh cage outside, beside the Ops Building where we would place him at times, during periods when the building was being cleaned. One of the Ops clerks, placed him in his cage one day, when his cage was in the shade; however, before long, the sun beat down directly on the cage and Ramrod died of sunstroke! The clerk had forgotten about him, until it was too late to save him and, of course, the clerk was crushed! Ramrod was buried in a 10-foot pipe and a reporter from the Stars & Strips Newspaper covered the funeral. This was how the Army Troops heard of Ramrod's death; prompting them to overwhelm us with their dropping by several giant snakes. One of them, a very large, almost black snake, because of his living in the deep brush had a very poor disposition so we turned him loose in the brush beside the Ops Building. When a "Papa san," who worked for us, saw that we had turned this big guy loose he grabbed the snake by the tail, and the snake would double back, as if to try to bite the man and the man would release him,
time after time. We asked him, why he wanted the snake and, he said to feed his baby! Ramrod
struck one of our pilots one day and shook him to no end. The snake was molting, which also
includes the shedding of the skin over his eyes, which clouds his vision, making him a bit testy,
until he is back to normal. When he struck, he opened his mouth to where his jaws were fully
exposed; similar to the extreme position, of the legs and pelvis that a young gymnast experiences
when accomplishing the splits. The snake has hundreds of small, needle like teeth and when he
struck the pilot on the arm, it brought out dozens of small beads of blood! Needless to say the
pilot no longer considered Ramrod his ever-loving buddy!

RV: I'm sure.

JK: He used to kiss and hug Ramrod, up to that point and thought that he was the
greatest! From that point on, he didn't have much to do with him anymore. Incidentally, the
papa san was unable to hang on to the tremendous, black python as the snake finally disappeared
back into the undergrowth.

RV: Back on the base?

JK: Yes. He disappeared beside the Ops Building.

RV: Right.

JK: We never caught sight of the large, black python again; although the Army Troops
kept dropping more snakes off until they finally felt that we just couldn't find another snake with
Ramrod's great disposition! Going back for a minute! When I first took command of the 531st
TFS, the Wing Commander, Colonel McLaughlin, asked if I was going to get rid of Ramrod, as
he wasn't too keen about snakes!!! I told him that I certainly was going to get rid of him until I
took over the squadron and realized how fond the pilots were of him! They loved that snake,
like the average family loves their little dog! Needless to say we kept Ramrod and I never raised
the subject again with the Wing Commander. As much as Colonel McLaughlin disliked snakes,
he use to enjoy placing Ramrod in the back seat of his staff car and, then drive over to the
Maintenance Office, where he would pick up his Deputy Commander for Maintenance [DCM],
an oriental full colonel, who was deathly afraid of snakes. Then he would drive around with the
DCM sitting on the passenger's side of the front seat, with his arm resting up along the back of
the seat! All of a sudden he would see the snake, and my God, he would bail out of the car!
Anytime that we would brief visitors in the Ops Briefing Room, Ramrod would be all coiled up
in the corner behind me, while the visitors were sitting there listening with their eyes all bugged
out, watching Ramrod!

RV: Would you guys feed Ramrod?

JK: Yes. If we ever found a bunch of mice or rats we would put them in Ramrods enclosure and he would eventually pick them up.

RV: That's a pretty memorable pet I would say. So for entertainment, you had an Officer's Club there. Were you in charge for allowing the men under you to go on R&R, or was that someone else's call?

JK: The Hawaiian R&Rs were controlled by our Wing Administrative Section! I do not recall any other R&R programs, per se; like on Okinawa where we had a courier aircraft, that made regularly scheduled runs to Shanghai; and in Korea, runs to Tokyo!

RV: Did you feel like you had a good rapport with the men under you?

JK: Yes. RV: Did you ever encounter any racial issues while there?

JK: Not a bit. The only thing that I can recall; not racial at all was a young man, that enlisted from Father Flanagan's Boy's Town! He was about 5'5" and just as pleasant as can be; however, he turned out to be a real terror and he got into everything under the sun. He finally got in so deep with the Air Police, that he cut his wrists as a means of relieving the pressure upon himself; as subsequently, he would be looked upon as a psychopathic personality rather than a criminal!

RV: What ethnicity was he?

JK: Caucasian.

RV: What was the bravest action that you witnessed while in Vietnam?

JK: Bravest?

RV: Yes sir!

JK: I didn't witness anything on the ground or in the air, that would warrant the award of anything above the Distinguished Flying Cross [DFC]; for the latter anyway, for heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight. Of course, there were many brave Troops, during the rocket attacks when they would scurry around on the ramp moving parked aircraft, to provide separation between those that were on fire and those that were not! There were a few Silver Stars awarded for gallantry in action; however, I was not a witness, in this regard! There were a couple of aircraft accidents of note; one involving a pilot that was buried in the cockpit, beneath the water for almost an hour, which was mentioned in my
RV: I was reading about that! I was going to ask you if you had any memorable events with the birds there and those came to mind.

JK: That was a hair raising accident, where you had a pilot trapped in his aircraft, under water with himself sustained oxygen system, slowly running out of oxygen!

RV: Can you describe that event?

JK: Yes. This is mentioned in my Memoirs! This pilot was a captain from an air base north of us. He was flying an F-100F [Two Seater], with an enlisted photographer in the rear seat. They were attacking a target just a short distance northwest of us, when they were hit by ground fire. The damage was such that they were losing fuel so rapidly, that the pilot declared an emergency and immediately headed for Bien Hoa. His wingman landed at Tan Son Nhut, in order to stay out of his way. The captain placed his bird on the final approach to Bien Hoa and, intentionally remained a little higher than normal and maintained a little more air speed than normal, in the event his engine should flame out. If so, he could still reach the runway. As it was he didn't run out of fuel but landed a bit long and fast, resulting in the proposing of the aircraft to the point, where the nose gear failed and the aircraft ended upside down in a deep pool of water, several hundred feet down the runway and off to the right side. The Wing Commander, was immediately upon the scene, and conducted the rescue operation, that included the use of two bulldozers with their cables attached to the fuselage; which incidentally, was all that was left of the aircraft. As the bulldozer crews were laboring to pull the fuselage from the watery pit, a fire broke out in the fuselage. Everyone pulled back from the site, for fear of being hit by ricocheting 20mm cannon ammunition, as it zipped about the area. When the three phase fire finally subsided; [1st] Fuel & Oil; [2nd] the magnesium and other metals, making up the fuselage and, finally [3rd] hundreds of rounds of 20mm Armor Piercing Incendiary [API] ammunition the rescue operation resumed! One of the Wing's doctors finally leaped into the water and managed to work his hand between the canopy and canopy rail to see if he could feel a body. At this point, the fuselage had been submerged in the water for almost an hour. As the doctor worked his hand around under the muddy water, he felt what he thought was the shoulder of an individual. At the next moment, he felt a hand come up and squeeze his own. Needless to say, the doctor leaped from the water and screamed: "The pilot is still alive!" As the rescue operation continued, with accelerated enthusiasm; the rescue personnel, were able to rotate the
fuselage to a degree where they could pry the canopy far enough to one side where it was
possible to free the pilot. It was found, that the young photographer had died as the aircraft
entered the crater. Had Colonel Catledge, who was the Wing Commander, at this time, not taken
charge as rapidly as he did and managed the crash site so effectively the crash site would have
digressed to a salvage operation and the pilot would have been recovered dead!

RV: The aircraft was upside down in the water?
JK: That's right. At this point, the only thing left of the aircraft was the fuselage and the
tail; and the tail was twisted 180 degrees about the aircraft's longitudinal axis! The Wing
Commander's staff car, was equipped with all of the necessary radio equipment; so that he was
able to communicate with everyone of the air base in his supervision of the rescue operations.
He very effectively rounded up two bulldozers, which were eventually able to manipulate the
fuselage, to where the pilot could be freed. As the aircraft entered the watery pit; the pilot
immediately placed his self-contained oxygen system to 100% oxygen, so was breathing directly
from the enclosed tanks; similar to the situation, where the skin diver swims underwater through
the use of a face mask and portable air tanks. When the pilot was asked, if he knew how long he
had been under water, he said: "About 15 minutes, "when it was actually about an hour! Also,
he didn't realize that the aircraft had caught on fire; nor did he hear the ammunition exploding in
the nose of the aircraft. The bottom line: Had the young photographer lived with both he and
the pilot, breathing 100% oxygen both would have been recovered dead, as there wasn't that
much oxygen left in the system! I believe, that the most lasting impression during this rescue
operation was the ricocheting of hundreds of rounds of 20mm cannon fire coming from the crash
site!

RV: Did you all go for cover at this point?
JK: Yes we did! We backed off a good distance and laid on the ground, or slipped
behind adequate cover until the fireworks subsided! As we returned to the aircraft; this is when
the Flight Surgeon, jumped into the water and slipped his hand into the flooded cockpit and felt
the pilot reach up and squeeze his hand! I sent Captain Olsen [Now a retired Major General] my
rendition of the accident; however, I never received an acknowledgement from him! I feel that
perhaps, he doesn't want to be reminded of the accident, because of the death of the young
photographer, Airman Second Class Saucier!

RV: Do you remember a really careless act with any of the birds?
JK: Careless?

RV: Yes sir!

JK: I surely can't think of anything right now! Oh yes we did have an incident, where a young captain, returning from his 250th combat mission decided to buzz the Control Tower to celebrate his End-of-Tour and soon to return Stateside! He was at treetop level, at 500 knots; when there was an explosion as the left wing came off of the aircraft. The aircraft continued straight ahead, shedding pieces of the bird, as it went, until it began to lose momentum and began to fall. At this point, the pilot blew the canopy off and as he was dropping down through the trees, he ejected however, he was dropping so fast by now, he simply started upwards in his seat at a rate pretty much equal to the downward speed of his aircraft and, he simply fell back into the wreckage and died instantly. He was a pilot from one of our sister squadrons! This was a prime example, of why a pilot should never put his bird through such strenuous maneuvering, immediately following a combat mission before the bird has been inspected for internal battle damage as structural failure can be the result! It was never determined, if this was the case, regarding this accident!

RV: Why didn't he eject any sooner than that?

JK: Under such conditions the pilot would be slammed very vigorously up against the side of the cockpit; where it can become very difficult, if not impossible, to function under almost impossible conditions! If he hadn't been at treetop level, but had plenty of altitude he would, no doubt, be alive today! When you raise the arm rests of the seat, in the F-100 the canopy blows off and a trigger is exposed in each arm rest; either when squeezed will eject the pilot as the rocket is fired! For some reason should the canopy fail to fire, upon raising the arm rests; by squeezing the exposed trigger on either arm rest you will be blown through the canopy!

RV: Sir, what were your impressions of the Vietnamese civilians that you had contact with?

JK: The only contact that I had with them; was the four or five small mix of males and females; that kept our Squadron Operations Building clean and managed our small Snack Bar, where we served Cokes, candy bars and sandwiches. They were very fine little folks. I made a habit of giving each of them a couple of Cokes, or so when they would finish work in the late afternoon, for their own consumption. Then one day, the English speaking, little female cashier advised, that it was unnecessary to provide her friends with Cokes, as they sneak them away
almost daily! It seems like a 25 cent Coke, sold for $1 to $2 in Saigon; so I told our little supervisor, that it was Ok! I never knew of any problems, with these little people on the base; however, there were stories going around, where there was an occasional incident in Saigon; where our Troops were shot at our stabbed, during drive-bys where a young lady on the back of a motor scooter would strike, while her boyfriend drove the scooter. As I mentioned in my Memoirs, just before I was to return to the States; I decided to drive into Saigon and check the AFEX for the last time, before catching a flight home! It was only about a 30 minute, round-trip drive to the AFEX, so I figured about one hour before I would be back on base. However, a few minutes east of Bien Hoa, the traffic came to a standstill along the main route, so I backed up a tad and turned off to the west a few hundred feet to pick up a tertiary route into Saigon. It was between the rice patties and simply two black earthen ruts through the sod. Within minutes, I knew that this was my second mistake; the first mistake that I didn't turn around and return to base the instant that traffic bogged down along the main route. I had no more then turned onto the earth and sod path, before I was bumper-to-bumper, with rickshaws, motor scooters and hundreds of refugees. I couldn't move forward or back and soon heard ammunition clipping through the trees around me; as a result of a fire fight between our Troops and the VC on the outskirts of Saigon. I was in my flying suit, with my Smith & Wesson,.38 caliber pistol in my shoulder holster. I cranked the windows up in the staff car, so that someone could not flip a hand grenade into the car. Most of our vehicles had been equipped with steel mesh across the windows to protect against explosives being tossed into them; however, most of our staff cars were not so protected! Anyway, my one hour sojourn into the AFEX and return, took eight hours before I arrived back at base! I felt so fortunate to be back on base, without losing our staff car that, I got out and kissed the ground! Amen!!

RV: Eight hours (laughs)?
JK: Eight hours rather than 45 minutes to one hour!
RV: You said that nothing happened to you at all? You just had a long journey.
JK: Yes.
RV: That's right before you were leaving country?
JK: Yes. I left in a couple of days. I thought, this is going to be tough! If I lose this staff car; Bob Coury is going to be disturbed with me! When I finally got back to base, I told him about it.
RV: Did he give you a hard time?
JK: No. I imagine that he felt fortunate that I hadn't gotten shot or lost the staff car!
RV: Did they tease you?
JK: Did they tease?
RV: Yes. Did they tease you about it?
JK: No. I think Coury was the only one that I told about it! I'm sure that he told McLaughlin about it; however, I left so soon after that I never heard anymore about it.
RV: Sir, looking back at your Vietnam experience, is there anything that you would change about it if you could?
JK: No. I can't think of a thing that I would change. It was an interesting year and just another one of my 30. It's interesting, that no matter where you go, or what combat theater you are in, there are always similarities and friends that you have known over the years that, help to make your tour comfortable. Of course, I always miss my wife, when I go off unaccompanied; however, I feel very fortunate that I never was shot down that would have been the pits!
RV: Yes. You flew 156 missions.
JK: Right. I would have liked to have flown 250, which was the average, for a year in South Vietnam; however, as a Squadron Commander, I briefed for 250 missions, but was preempted almost 100 times, by the Wing Commander, or some other authority for a higher priority situation! I always had a back up pilot, brief along with me in the event, I was preempted! The most aggravating thing for me, during my years of flying; was to arrive at that point, where I was scheduled to fly, only to have the mission scratched for some reason! I believe I previously mentioned, a young USAF Academy Graduate, in the 531st who flew 250 missions; with one bail out one black night and recovered by a chopper; only to volunteer for another year during which he flew another 250 for a total of 500 missions in two years!
RV: Wow!
JK: He was a very fortunate young lieutenant, in flying that many missions; as his one ejection could have been fatal!
RV: Right. From Vietnam you went to Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.
JK: Right. I was selected to attend the Class of ’69 of the Air War College at Maxwell! I checked in May of ’68 for the one year school. We were exempt from flying, while attending the school, in order to give full attention to academics!
RV: How much of a transition was it from Vietnam to Maxwell? I mean you've made so many moves and transitions in your life, coming out of this war zone, how was that for you?

JK: No problem at all Routine! I left Tan Son Nhut AB in a commercial contract jet and landed in California. It was a civil flight from there to Miami, where Jodi picked me up at the airport. After a few days, we drove to Montgomery and, found an apartment. It was just another move!

RV: After you got off the flight, back stateside and you flew to Miami, were you in uniform?

JK: Yes.

RV: Did you have any negative receptions anywhere along the route?

JK: Not a bit! I made full bird just before I left Vietnam. The most distasteful thing to me, were the antics of the students, on some of the colleges _ as shown on TV! I thought, my God was the war covered in such detail, that it was responsible for bringing about such treasonable actions! The AWC, was just another Stateside assignment; and the fourth time that I was assigned there since WWII! This was a very interesting year; as we had a very large number of great speakers, to include such personalities as the SecDEF/SecSTATE and top USAF Generals of most of the Major Commands; as well as, top civilian speakers from around the Country! We averaged almost a speaker a day!

RV: How much did you follow Vietnam, the War and American policy once you had arrived back Stateside?

JK: Followed it how?

RV: Followed it in the news? What the US was doing in country.

JK: I didn't really watch it that much! I just knew, that if we moved out and left it for the ARVN to face the north alone the south would fall overnight!

RV: Do you remember how you felt in April 1975, when Saigon fell?

JK: I felt that it would be inevitable and very fast; so I wasn't the least bit surprised! Of course, I felt sorry for the South Vietnamese!

RV: So you felt that it would be just a matter of time?

JK: Yes.

RV: What is your perception of Vietnam today?

JK: What little I see, seems like they're doing fabulously well coming out of that terrible
tearing up of their country! I don't know what kind of problems they may have regarding politics
and rulers! With all that terrible bombing of their country, both in the north and south; it appears
that there isn't any trace of that destruction, when you see TV coverage of Congressmen,
College & School Groups roaming about the country as though they were in Disneyworld! Of
course, the time has passed so fast; that I simply can't believe that I have been retired for 30
years. It seems more like a few months _ when I have actually been retired for the same number
of years that I spent in the AUS/USAF!

RV: Right, I guess you have!
JK: Twenty-seven years on their own, and I see pictures of cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi
Minh now _ and, it's hard to believe they're getting along so great!

RV: How much contact have you had with Vietnamese here in the United States, if any?
JK: Not a bit!

RV: Looking back, when you were over there, are there any songs that remind you of
that period when you were in Bien Hoa?
JK: No, not at all!

RV: What about books on Vietnam? What would you consider some of the better books,
if you know of any, that chronicle the War, or parts of it?

JK: I haven't really read anything on Vietnam; I guess I'm a bit lazy! I've seen a little
coverage on TV regarding both the north and south; but nothing that interested me to any degree.
I was contacted by a French writer a few years ago from Strasbourg, who was covering the war
in Vietnam and, I provided him with considerable input; however, the book was in French so I
passed it on to a friend, who was interested in the research of such information, that might throw
some light on his late father's activities in SEA!

RV: Have you seen any of the movies that have come out of Vietnam?
JK: Yes. I've seen a few!

RV: What do you think of those?
JK: I'm not interested in the Hollywood versions of what transpired over there; however,
an occasional documentary isn't too hard to take!

RV: What kind of lessons do you think the United States government learned, if any,
from Vietnam?
JK: One thing it was a much broader and protracted war than we thought that it was
going to be and, to overwhelm such seemingly insignificant little guerrilla personnel, wasn't nearly so easy as we once thought, even though they were so technically inferior! We started out with hundreds of thousands of men, with General Westmoreland informing the President and Congress, that we were doing fine, but we could always use a few hundred more Troops! Until, finally Westmoreland, was accused of lying or stretching the truth and, the citizenry began to come on scene with their anti-war banners and chants, damning the lose of so many young men, only to see the entire country of Vietnam to fall to the Communists from the north! We fighter guys, were assigned to the various fighter wings throughout South Vietnam dedicated to do our all, so long as our "Powers in Being" told us to bare our fangs and go after the bad guys! I never gave it a thought one way or the other, but I felt fortunate not to have ended up as a POW!

RV: For young people today if, you were to walk into a college classroom, or high school classroom what would you tell them about Vietnam?

JK: Pretty much, just what we have been talking about here.

RV: Would you ever want to go back to Vietnam?

JK: Like now, just to look around!

RV: Yes sir.

JK: Jodi and I have done a great deal of traveling since I retired; covering such places as the UK, Europe, South America and Australia. I've spent about five years throughout the Pacific and SEA; and do not really care to travel that area like the other areas of the globe! I've spent seven years in and around Europe; to include the Eastern Block and it is much easier to get around over there in a Hertz rental.

RV: Right. You spent a lot of time there.

JK: Yes. One time we had our car shipped over for a three-month stay; however, it's much easier to have a Hertz vehicle awaiting your arrival. Russia is the only country in Europe, that I know of that Hertz will not authorize the use of their vehicles.

RV: After Maxwell, you were assigned to Langley AFB, in Virginia, for about four years?

JK: Right.

RV: You had a desk job. What made you retire? You just got your 30 years in?

JK: Yes. I was getting up there. I was working in Plans & Programs; as well as Studies when one was required. There wasn't any flying the same as Maxwell at the AWC; however, we
still received our flight pay! General Momyer, who was the 7th Air Force Commander, there in Vietnam was also the Tactical Air Command [TAC], Commander in the Headquarters Building at Langley. I was involved in a one year study there, regarding the restructure and equipping of TAC; which turned out to be one of the most arduous tasks that I was ever involved in, during my 30 years in the USAF! As I approached retirement, I received a telephone call from the Colonel's assignment Section, in the Pentagon, advising that I had been selected to serve as the Air Attaché in Israel! They added, that if I accepted the assignment, I would spend one year in GE language school in Washington, D.C., before shipping to Israel. When they asked me how I felt about it, I said that I would have to think about it for awhile and, asked how much time that they would give me. They said: "Take a few days!" I asked, the fact that I was being offered a new assignment; was the USAF policy in effect that, states if a Full Colonel or above is offered an assignment and turns it down he will be placed on retirement orders almost immediately?

RV: Really! Ok.

JK: So I asked them if that policy was in effect. They said: "No this is a special deal!" He said: "You think about it, and call us back!" When I asked them, if it would be a flying assignment where I could fly their fighters, they said it was not and that I would be a member of the Ambassadors Staff. I talked it over with Jodi and we both felt that this was an assignment that we could pass on and, I called the Pentagon back and advised that I would pass it by. Had it been a flying position, I probably would have opted for it and, Jodi since her involvement in the "Born Again Christian" thing, has said maybe it may have been a rewarding assignment! Not long after this possible assignment, I heard that a friend of mine that I worked with on the TAC_85 Study, mentioned above had taken over an Airlift Wing in the Midwest and was after me to take over the base there, as Air Base Commander! This, of course, would not be a tactical fighter operation so I slipped over to our TAC Headquarters, Personnel Office and put in for a retirement date, approximately one year hence! This would ensure, that when this assignment was officially offered to me, and I turned it down I, already had a retirement date so, I would be allowed to serve until that date, rather than retired immediately!

RV: Probably, yes sir!

JK: When I slipped over to Personnel, and put in for my date of retirement I don't believe that the personnel officer had any idea, that this new assignment as a base commander, was in
the works! He was a lieutenant colonel and simply went ahead and completed the necessary paper
work to affect my retirement on my selected date! It was just a couple of days later, when my friend Claude Turner called from the Midwest base and advised, that he had good news for me indicating, that I would be joining him, as Base Commander! He was very much surprised, when I told him that I had put my retirement papers in. He wrote me a nice letter thanking me for supporting him in the past and closed by stating that he would probably be following me into retirement before too long. I have since heard that he did retire and died shortly thereafter. The fact, that I had this last year to go, I volunteered for Vietnam again, in hopes of flying my last year; however, my request wasn't favorably acted upon.

RV: Oh, you did?

JK: Yes. The fact that I had a year or so to go now until retirement, I felt that I could do more back in Vietnam rather than sitting at a desk there at TAC Headquarters. The Colonel's Assignment Troops in the Pentagon, said no to my request however, because I was now pending retirement! I pleaded with them, to no avail, and they finally called the major general that I worked under and advised him that I was trying to do something to extend my retirement date, which wasn't true. But the general sided with them, because I had beaten the system, a few days before by putting in my retirement papers to sidestep an undesirable assignment and name a date of retirement of my liking! I didn't realize it at the time, but I really foxed a lot of folks from the Pentagon on down when I slipped into Personnel, at TAC Headquarters and put my retirement papers in, before they could offer me the base commander assignment in the Midwest. Had I not heard through the "grape vine," that this base commander assignment, was in the works I could have faced immediate retirement, when I turned it down!

RV: Would you have gotten paid more, if you went back into a war zone?

JK: I don't recall, if we received combat pay or not; if not, my pay would have remained the same. If we did receive combat pay, it would have been something like another $100 per month! The bottom line, regarding the base commander assignment with Claude Turner, there in the Midwest! After chatting with the General for awhile, he advised that they could scrap my retirement papers in favor of my accepting the base commander assignment! I told him that I would stick with my retirement date! As we concluded our dealings, the General said well it would be much better all around, should you decide to stay on! And before my retirement date came around the General had preceded my retirement for some reason! I received inquiries from
several of my senior officer friends, about this time, asking me how I was able to come out on top during these past two transactions, with everything stacked against me and, I said I had no idea!

RV: Right.

JK: I realize, that when you are approached by your superiors, and are offered a position; especially a special assignment considerable time and effort has gone into the researching of official records and the elimination process until they have arrived at the name of an individual; only to have that individual say "No Thanks," can raise the dander, of even the most cool headed! This is why the USAF has that policy, where full colonels and above, are retired when they turn down routine assignments offered them. One friend of mine, had his 30 years in, but wanted to remain in the area for another year, in order to firm up his position within the local business community; however, he heard that he was going to be reassigned so immediately slipped over to Personnel to select a retirement date to his satisfaction, like I did however, he was told: "Oh no, you're not going to try that; an officer tried that in the past and got away with it and, it's no longer what an individual can do!" My friend, was therefore forced to retire at that time!

RV: Well sir, is there anything else you want to add to this interview?

JK: No. I guess that's about it! I returned to our home in Miami and simply retired completely. We travel a great deal and maintain our pad and cars. I will go ahead a send you a copy of my Memoirs and the 7th AF Pamphlet 7AFP 55-1. Like I say, it's a small 4"x6" manual of about 140 pages. It covers 7th AF Tactical Air Operations throughout Vietnam!

RV: Sir, let me sign off, really quickly. This will conclude our Oral History Interview with Colonel Jack L. Keith.