Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I’m conducting an interview with Mr. Kenneth Kruger. I am in Lubbock, Texas; today is February 25, 2003. I am in the Special Collections Library Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech University, Mr. Kruger’s in Reno, Nevada, and Sir, let’s get started. Let’s talk a little bit about your childhood and where you grew up. Tell me first of all when you were born and where you were born.

Kenneth Kruger: Okay. I was born in Oakland, California, December 10, 1939.

RV: Did you grow up there?

KK: I grew up in the Bay Area. We lived in San Leandro, which is just down the road. I went through high school and never left the state until I joined the Air Force.

RV: Really. Okay, so was this, this was a smaller town outside of Oakland where you grew up?

KK: Yes, it’s connecting to Oakland, it’s one of those deals where you go from one town to the next and the only reason you know you changed is because there was a sign there that said you were in another town.

RV: Okay, well tell me about your childhood. What are your memories of growing up there?

KK: Okay. Well, I remember when I was real young, World War II was going on and my uncle was in World War II in the Navy and I spent a lot of time with my grandparents who were in a little town outside of the Bay Area that was called Alamo, and we would go and stay there for short lengths of time. I remember some of the
visitors that we had that were Navy friends of my uncle. One of the best remembrances I have when I was real young was when we would go to Mt. Diablo there was a lake and it was an R&R base for military, which I didn’t know anything about that. But I remember going up to the lake and seeing it and thinking, ‘What a beautiful place,’ and I remember with my aunts that we were up there doing that. After I got older and I fly light airplanes, and I flew around Mt. Diablo looking for that lake and it doesn’t exist any more, but I really missed it because, it probably was not very big, it was probably the size of a fish pond if you really know but it seemed big to me at the time because I was very young. But that was my, my grandmother kind of had a feeling that I was going to go in the Navy and all that stuff when I, she was a Norwegian and she really respected the sea because she came from Norway and had a lot of friends that were sea captains and that kinds of stuff so it kind of looked like the, and of course my uncle being in the Navy; he was in the Navy prior to World War II, was just about to get out when World War II started so then he was locked in and then stayed until he retired.

RV: What did he do in the war?

KK: He was a chief radioman and he was, well he started out in the Philippines when the war broke and he made an escape on a small boat, him and a couple other sailors and they made the escape to Australia on this small boat; how they ever made it nobody knows. He can’t even figure out how he made it.

RV: What was he escaping from?

KK: Well, the capture of the Philippines; it was either being in, you know captured or making it to some safe zone and the only safe zone at the time was Australia.

RV: Wow, so he made it all the way down there.

KK: Right, and they had this boat, I guess it was like seventy, eighty feet, it wasn’t a real small boat but it was a, but they had put a wooden gun on it to make it look like it had armament and stuff to try and scare the airplanes away. And they went from cove to cove as they, around the Philippines to try and make their escape and they finally made it. So, that was the record of him. After that he served on three submarines that were sunk right after he got off of them. They asked him one time to get out of the submarines that they had this position on a light cruiser and it was one of the early light cruisers with the think skin and he thought about it and he’d said, ‘Boy, it would be really
nice, being a chief and then being on a light cruiser like that,” but he turned it down for
another submarine and the cruiser was lost all hands next trip out, so he really had a…and
the one thing he told me is he never expected to make it through the war. He just knew
that somewhere his number was up and he was going to go, but actually it never
happened. And he was an alcoholic and he was an alcoholic before the war and he was
an alcoholic during the war and he was alcoholic after the war and somehow he made it
through his twenty years and retired and he was still an alcoholic, he almost didn’t get to
retire. Then all of a sudden he joined AA and he became really big in the post office
department, he worked directly for the Postmaster General in an Alcohol Program that
they were doing and really made something of himself after he sobered up.

RV: Well, that’s good. It sounds like from what you were saying that he was a
pretty big influence upon you as a child and knowing about his career in the Navy and in
the war and the things that he did and especially this great escape?

KK: Yes, he was, he was quite an influence on me and.

RV: Go ahead.

KK: Okay, well also and I was convinced as soon as I got out of high school I was
going to join the Navy.

RV: How about your parents, what did they think about that, were they an
influence at all in going toward the military?

KK: No, not really. My father was a businessman, he owned his own business
and I’m sure he would have liked me to have gone into the business with him instead of
what I was doing, but I guess I let it be known all along that I was going to go in the
Navy as soon as I got out of high school.

RV: Did you have brothers and sisters?

KK: I had two brothers and a sister, all younger than me and the next brother
down, he’s actually the one that went into my dad’s business and took it over and then the
younger brother is still in my dad’s business; my dad’s long gone. So – and none of
them were interested in the military.

RV: So it was just you.

KK: It was only me, yes.

RV: Why is that?
KK: I don’t know. My grandmother kind of expected…of course she wanted me to go in and become an officer but that never happened. I don’t know, it was through my grandmother I guess that I just had the idea that I was going to go in the Navy, funny thing happened though, its about three months before I was actually going to go into the service, I met a guy from the Air Force and I sat down and talked to him for – he was a staff sergeant – I sat down and talked to him for about, oh a couple hours and when I got done I changed my mind and I joined the Air Force. And it was amazing because after I got in the Air Force and I had several dealings with the Navy and when I get in the Navy bases I’d look around and I’d say, ‘You know, I’m sure thankful I did what I did because I wouldn’t have lasted, you know I would have barely lasted the four years in the Navy and I’d have been out.’

RV: Really?

KK: Yes, it’s just, I saw the way they lived and the way they treated enlisted men and all that kind of stuff. Of course in the Air Force, I was on a flight crew, so you’re right there with your crew all the time, so whether it’s a major or a colonel or whatever you’re flying with, you’re very close to him and he’s close to you because you’re doing the job directly for him, so it’s a whole different situation from the Navy where they’re so military, in fact the least military of all the organizations is the Air Force.

RV: Okay, before we go there, tell me a little bit about your schooling, what kind of student were you growing up?

KK: Okay, I was, I was fairly, I was an average student through grammar school, you know nothing good, nothing bad, just kind of a C student all the way through, barely making it. Hated arithmetic, didn’t like to read. When I got to junior high school, it was a miracle that I made it through because I was a terrible student there, I just, you know, bad attitude, junior high, teenager, knew everything in the world, nobody’s going to teach me anything. And I had one class that I really remember very much was the social studies class and I hated the teacher, and I mean just hated the teacher and the teacher told me that, ‘You’re not going to make it through this class, you’re going to get an F and you are going to fail.’ And I says, ‘Oh, okay.’ Well, all of a sudden came up you had to take this Constitution test and they told us this Constitution test was going to be half your grade in this class and it wasn’t a test just for this teacher to give, it was a statewide
California test. So for some reason the Constitution really rang bells for me and I liked reading it and I believed in it and everything else and came time to take the test and when the results came back in a couple weeks after that, the teacher walked into the class and she says, ‘I want to tell everybody in this class, I am so amazed because the highest score that this school has ever gotten was by Ken Kruger,’ and I passed it, I about fell under my chair and so she had to give me a C in the class, so I made it. So when I got to high school I still wasn't that…my dad wanted me to take college prep courses and all that stuff and I just wasn’t…the one thing that stopped me was foreign language. I could have spent five years in Spanish I and I’d have never made it past Spanish I and it was just something that I wasn't going to learn, so finally when I got out of the college prep routine, it was my junior year, then I became an honor roll student from then on and started really enjoying school, you know even the social studies type classes and stuff I really liked, so school became pleasurable to me after all that time.

RV: Okay, okay. Did you play sports?

KK: Yes, I played sports but it was mostly intramural, I didn't get on any of the…I went out for football but didn’t make it. Too small basically. I was 5’7, 140 pounds and there was no way I was going to make the team with that weight.

RV: Right. Did you work any during junior high and high school?

KK: I worked at my dad’s plant ever summer.

RV: Okay, what kind of plant was it?

KK: It’s manufacture, food manufacture, mostly pickles, so I’d spend the summers out there, worked three months of the summer and then the money I made there my grandmother would keep for me and then when I needed, I bought my own car and that kind of stuff.

RV: Was there any pressure upon you or did your parents say, ‘Look, you need to go to college,’ or did they leave that up to you?

KK: Well, no my dad constantly pressured me to go to college and I just knew, just the college prep experience and when they told me I had to take a foreign language in college I said that’s it, I’m not going. So then I read Lee Iacocca’s book and find out that he picked his college by the fact that they didn’t require foreign language. If I had knew that I might have gone on to college.
RV: So you decided basically, did you make a decision to go into the service then, when you decided not to go to college?

KK: No, I had already planned on going into the service.

RV: Okay, so that was a given.

KK: Whether I went in after high school or after college, you know, but since I had already made up my mind I wasn’t going to college.

RV: Okay, what years were you in high school?

KK: I was in high school…let’s see, I graduated in ’58, so I was there for four years.

RV: Okay, ’54 to ’58.

KK: Yes.

RV: And so in ’58 is when you joined the Air Force?

KK: Yes.

RV: Okay, and you said that you were persuaded out of this kind of lifelong dream of going to the Navy by this one visit; what did he say to you to convince you to go to the Air Force?

KK: I have no idea; I can’t remember what it was that convinced me. First, well he had a very positive outlook on the Air Force. He was a mechanic and he says, he was telling me it was the closest thing to a civilian job, he wasn’t, you know he wasn't having to march and worry about a Class A pass or something like that, ‘Can I get off the base,’ and all that. Just the way he expressed how the Air Force was so much freer than the other services and boy, was he right.

RV: Did you have a desire to fly?

KK: I had no idea that I was going to get to fly. I thought I was going to go in and be a mechanic because I had a high mechanical aptitude. When I took the tests, when you first go in they give you the aptitude test, I got the highest you could get for mechanics, I got a ninety-five percentile and you can’t get any higher than that and for admin or clerical I got a fifteen which is the lowest you could get, so it was quite a spread.

RV: Right, so they kind of knew where you were going to go.
KK: So I thought I was going to become a mechanic and then I was amazed in Basic Training, the guy asked me, you knew he says, ‘Now here’s, since you got this high score in mechanics you get this big list to pick from, what do you want?’ and I said, ‘Okay, here aircraft mechanic number one.’ He says, ‘Okay, pick number two,’ and I looked down the list and I said, ‘Okay, aircraft engine mechanic number two,’ and I looked way down the bottom of the list and I said, ‘What’s this in-flight refueling?’ He said, ‘Oh, that’s boom operator type guy that’s in the,’ I said, ‘Oh I want to do that, pick that as number three.’ He said, ‘You’ve got to pick that as one if you pick it.’ I said, ‘I want it as one, then.’ So they said for flight school and there I went to school.

RV: Now, when was that, was that after your Basic, or was that…?

KK: Yes, during Basic, we had six weeks of Basic.

RV: This was at Lackland Air Force Base?

KK: Yes, and in your sixth week they call you in to see how they’re going to place you, what tech schools you’re going to go to. Now, the ones that aren’t selected for tech schools wind up in Basic for fifteen weeks or some thing like that. Now when we got out in six weeks to go to school we were still technically in Basic Training so when we got to, when I got to the base up there in North Texas.

RV: Sheppard?

KK: Sheppard, yes when I got to Sheppard I was still technically in Basic Training so we had to go to classes and all that kind of stuff.

RV: Well, tell me about your Lackland Basic Training, what do you remember about that?

KK: I had a, the funniest thing that happened to me is I guess every outfit’s got one, but we had a Gomer Pyle. So when we were – the shock of getting there I was kind of expecting, first thing I saw was all these guys marching with these baggy fatigues and pith helmets on and I looked at them and I said, ‘You know, that’s the ugliest looking outfit I’ve ever seen in my life.’ So then we got in there and of course the DI was, his name was Klopfenstein, one of the very few names I really remember and when he yelled everything on the base shook. I tell you that guy had a voice. And he called you every dirty word in the book and everything, but I soon saw what was happening. You know they break you down to the smallest they can and then when they give you a privilege
you really appreciate that privilege. And then of course you’re being melded into working as a team. But I had this friend of mine as we were going along and he was telling me, he said, ‘You know this is the easiest Basic Training there’s ever got to be,’ I says, ‘Where else would you get hot chow on a bivouac and all that kind of stuff?’ And I agreed with him and then of course the fact that in so many weeks we’re going to go into the real Air Force, get out of this. But the one I do remember, the Gomer Pyle, is…we had these gig slips, and when you did something wrong he’d ask you for a form, whatever it was, and you’d sign it and you’d hand it to them and they gave you five of them or something like that. Well they never collected one from me. But we were in an inspection and we’re all standing and the Gomer Pyle was in the bunk next to me on my left side. And when you stand there, you’re at parade rest and you’re looking straight across the aisle at the guy in front of you and you’re looking eye to eye with him and when they come to you, you come to attention and then they inspect your area and then they go to the next guy. Well, they got to this kid and all I heard was Klopfenstein scream at the top of his lungs, ‘Who made this bunk?’ and the kids says, ‘I did, sir,’ and he picked the whole bunk up and he threw it on the floor and he says, ‘Give me a Form 41,’ and he says, ‘I don’t have any, sir.’ He says, ‘You don’t have any? Why not?’ He says, ‘You took them all,’ and you could hear the giggles all the way upstairs in the barracks, it was going. And he says, ‘Why didn’t you come up and get some more?’ And he says, ‘I did, Sir, but you took those, too.’ And that did it. Man, that was the hardest job I ever had trying to keep a straight face. When I saw Gomer Pyle years ago, that’s what I related back to immediately. There is one just like that in every outfit, and the DI screaming in his ear when he’s marching, because he couldn’t keep in step either. He never made it through Basic; they kept him back. And at that time, everybody in the Air Force were all volunteers, even though they had a draft in the Army.

RV: How did you adapt to the military lifestyle?

KK: Oh, perfectly. I melded right in. It all made sense to me. I took orders well and I just had no problem at all.

RV: What did you go to classroom training and have physical training or was it just mainly physical?
KK: Well, in Basic it’s mostly physical, you know, march, march, march…learn to be together. Some of the things that made Basic Training so easy for me were that I had this friend that was telling me how the Air Force was easier than everybody else’s. We had to go on this bivouac, and when we went out on the bivouac, we had to sit there and line up these shelter halves, these little pup tents and dig a trench around it, and they had to be lined up just perfect, with a string line and all that stuff. I asked them, ‘Why are we digging this drip trench around the tent?’ And he says, ‘Oh, that’s in case it rains, it catches the water,’ and I said ‘Well it doesn’t make any sense to me because the water’s still going to come up to the top.’ Anyway, I says, ‘Okay, that’s fine.’ So then we were going to have an all night hike that night. So first of all they came out with hot chow and the guy’s telling me, he said, ‘What did I tell you?’ He says, ‘If you’re in the Marines or the Navy or something else,’ he says, ‘You can bet we’d be eating C-rations or something, not, you wouldn’t have this truck with hot chow out here.’ And I agreed, so we had the hot chow and then that night we’re going to have the bivouac and just as we lined up for this all night march it started to sprinkle. So the lieutenant that was in charge of us says, ‘Oh, cancel the march, everybody go back to bed.’ I said, ‘Oh, that’s good.’ So we got into bed and I went to sleep and about midnight a thunder bumper coming, this is Texas, when you get a thunder bumper it really comes in and it started pouring and I started sinking in the mud. And I’m looking over at this buddy of mine, and I said, ‘Man, we’re sinking,’ I said, ‘What happened to that drip trench?’ And it just filling up the, and finally I heard them screaming outside, ‘Everybody out to the road.’ So we went out and of course as soon as you got out of the tent you almost went up to your calf in the mud and we scooted up to the road, they marched us all back to our barracks, we all took a shower and went to bed, so that was it for bivouac, it was over.

RV: You never had another one?

KK: Never had another one. And I was very disappointed because they had an obstacle course and I wanted to go on it and we didn’t get to.

RV: What would you say was the most challenging aspect of your Basic there at Lackland?

KK: Of Basic, well, there was some memorization you had to do and as far as the ranks of every service I knew, I knew what a captain was in the Navy compared to a
colonel in the Air Force and I knew what a master sergeant was, so I had that down because my uncle had left a blue jacket manual and when I was in junior high school I read that manual and I read all the ranks so I knew them all and so I didn’t have any problem with that, so you had to know that. You had to know the chain of command from your DI all the way up to the President of the United States, so that was easy for me, didn’t have any trouble there. But then they had these general orders and by gosh, what is your third general order and I don’t remember any of them and I had a hell of a time with those things. Luckily, every time they came down and asked questions, they’d ask the guy next to me, ‘What’s your sixth general order?’ and then he’d get a gig slip because he wouldn’t remember and then he’d come to me and say, ‘What is a symbol of a colonel?’ And I’d say, ‘An eagle, sir,’ and he’d go on to the next guy. So I lucked out all the way through because they never, ever asked me a general order and I didn’t know any of them. I knew you didn’t desert your post without being replaced and all that but I couldn’t put them into order or word them or anything like that. That was the worst part of Basic for me was even trying to remember those things.

RV: Hmm, wow. Did other men have any particularly difficulties that you remember, besides this Gomer Pyle guy?

KK: Well, let’s see. No, I don’t think we had too many because most of them had a pretty good aptitude and they were all volunteers, no I would say most of them picked right on up. That Gomer Pyle guy was the only guy I know that was kept back.

RV: What kind of weapons training did you have?

KK: None.

RV: Really?

KK: Well, first of all the Air Force doesn’t carry arms when they march; they’re the only service that doesn’t. We did have, we went out and we’re supposed to qualify with a .30-caliber carbine so I went out to the range, they issued these carbines, they’re going to give you five shots to sight in, so I got up there and I was always a good shot. So I got up there and of course we’re doing it from the prone position and I fired the first shot, put it right through the bull’s eye, second shot’s top of the target. I said, ‘What’s going on here?’ So I looked at the sight and the sight was just loose as a goose, it wouldn’t stay anywhere, so I raised my hand and I told the sergeant, I said, ‘This
weapon’s defective, the sight’s off.’ And he says, ‘Well, just tough,’ and he walks off.

So I had to Kentucky windage the whole thing and I barely, barely qualified, but I did qualify without the sight. So, then later on when I was on a flight crew you’d do one with pistols and the first year I had to qualify they hand you a .45, the Dick Tracy .45 and my hand’s pretty small and a .45’s huge and then they put you out with about forty other guys to qualify, no earplugs, and you’re standing shoulder to shoulder with everybody and as soon as you try and take a bead, four other shots go off and you jump about five feet in the air and so I had a hard time qualifying there, but I did qualify. The next year they .38s and I brought earplugs and I qualified expert, no problem at all and of course the .38 fit in my hand perfect, so that was all the weapons trainings we had.

RV: Okay, okay. How would you rate the instruction that you received at Lackland?

KK: In weapons?

RV: In general, for your Basic Training?

KK: Well, I’d say it was excellent. The purpose of Basic Training is to make you work as a team and to take orders and I think they did a wonderful job.

RV: Okay, so you transitioned to Sheppard after six weeks.

KK: Yes.

RV: And you, did you start classroom training and?

KK: Yes, that was classroom and I was going into in-flight refueling and I was highly motivated there and they had an excellent training facility. They had actual real pods for the KB-50, they had the boom set up for a KC-97, all on the ground to where you could actually get up and see how it worked and everything. I passed the highest in the class, and I was highly motivated and when I get motivated I do well.

RV: How long did this training last?

KK: I think it was, well it was another six or eight weeks.

RV: This is still 1958?

KK: Yes, well it was ’59, let’s see, I went to my next station in January of ’59.

RV: Where was that?

KK: That was at England Air Force Base, Louisiana, outside Alexandria.

RV: And did you continue the in-flight refueling training?
KK: Well, what we do there is not you go on the job training and I remember the
civilian airport was also the air base at the time. So when I was flying into the place I’m
on a civilian airplane and I can see as we’re letting down at the airport all the KB-50s,
and I says, ‘Oh, there’s my airplane,’ first time I ever got to see one. And we landed and
we taxied into the terminal which is at the far side of the base and when I got out there’s
not signs or anything to tell you what to do or anything and I said, ‘Well at least I know
where I’m going.’ So I grab my bags and I walked out on the flight line and I walk right
down along the F-100s that were all parked out there and everything, of course this is all
a restricted area but I don’t know that and finally the air police comes up there and he
says, ‘Where you going?’ No badge, no nothing, just bags in my hand. One stripe on my
arm and I told him, I says, ‘Well I’m going to the 622nd Air Refueling Squadron.’ He
says, ‘Get on board,’ and he says, ‘I’ll take you there.’ So I got and we’re driving down
and he says, ‘What do you do?’ and I said, ‘Well, I’m a reel operator,’ and he says, ‘Oh,
they’re sending replacements already.’ And I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ He
says, ‘They lost one off the end of the runway this morning, killed the whole crew.’ And
it was that, that was their first squadron loss and it was the day I got there and it killed the
whole crew. They were doing an operational readiness inspection and they were taking
off in formation, not in formation but in line to join a formation and one of them lost all
four engines on takeoff and the engineer had set something wrong and it was a very cold
morning and he had set the turbos to normal pre-heat where they should be on a takeoff
pre-heat and it slammed the waste gates all the way shut and it over boosted all the
engines and they lost them on takeoff.

RV: How did you feel about that?
KK: Well, I wasn’t really too excited about that, and then when I got to the
squadron they were all still under the sober eye and everything, so they basically told me
to go to the barracks, they’d have a guy take me to the barracks and they’d get in touch
with me in a couple of days. So I went to the barracks and I sat there for a couple of days
and did nothing and then finally they contacted me and I went back and signed in and
everything. Then what they’d do is they, the first flight I ever took, it was going to be a
ten hour navigation flight and I had asked the guy I was flying with, he was going to be
my instructor, his name was Boyce Mayo and I asked him I said, ‘Do these things ever
land anyplace else?’ He says, ‘Nope,’ he says ‘Ten hours, straight out over the United
States and back,’ and…okay. So we got on the airplane and we took off and we, of
course I’m the third guy on board, they don’t give me a position, I’m just sitting in the
middle between the two reel operators and we got over Oklahoma City and one of our
ailerons was vibrating like crazy out there, so the engineer climbed back there and he
looked at it, went back up front, the pilot came back and he looked back and climbed up
front and says, ‘Okay, we’re going to make an emergency landing at Tinker.’ So we
went to Tinker and they stuck us in a motel for the night. Now, I’m an airmen third class
and I’ve never been anywhere with anything, so we’re all in the motel the first night, and
he says ‘Okay, next day we’re going to just fly straight back to Alexandria.’ So we got
on the airplane and we flew straight back to Alexandria but the weather was socked in, so
we made an approach and it was a GCA guided approach and as we broke out at two
hundred feet we were way, way, right of the runway, so we made a go-around, we came
in and made another approach and same spot when we broke out, so we went to
Shreveport and spent the night at the SAC base up there. So they sent us to a motel
again. Well the guys were all broke, so I’m lending them money and I’m flying with a
master sergeant, a tech sergeant, and a staff sergeant and I’m an airmen third and I’m
loaning them money because they don’t have any with them, so anyway I thought that
was pretty funny. So that was my first flight.

RV: How did you feel with the very first time going up in a plane?

KK: Oh, I loved it, see and the first time I ever flew in my life was the day they
flew me to Lackland, I had never been on an airplane in my life.

RV: Did you have any fear at all?

KK: No, I just love flying, yes it was, seemed to be in my blood, so any chance I
got to fly on that KB-50 I was on it and I’ll never forget the first time we did a refueling.
I wasn’t, I was just riding along as a spectator again but it was like the second flight we
were taking, we were going up to do a refueling mission and seeing the F-100s come up
and making their hookups and all the things that you remember from the movies, none of
them are true, you can’t hear the airplane at all, all you hear is your own airplane and
watch the hookup and everything and it was spectacular to me to see that. So I enjoyed
flying, every bit of it.
RV: When did you first actually work the boom and do the refueling?

KK: That came…oh, it was probably…gee, I don’t even remember doing my first one. I remember them putting me in the seat and letting me ride there for awhile, you know, just being a scanner and we did some landings and takeoffs where you call the gear down and the flaps down and all that kind of stuff in the back and then later on we finally got refueling and they let me do the, put the hose out and that kind of stuff. I can’t remember exactly when that happened and how soon it happened.

RV: Was it easy for you once you got into it?

KK: Yes, I picked it right up, there was nothing to it for me and there was second nature to me. I learned pretty much everything about the airplane, all the non-essential stuff that they want you to remember for your standboard checks and everything, so I just, it was, I really had the aptitude for it and to tell you the truth, if I could have stayed in that airplane I’d still be there today.

RV: Really?

KK: Oh, yes.

RV: Well, tell me about it, what appealed to you about that airplane?

KK: Well it was, if you know what a B-29 looks like – you know, the one that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima? Well, it’s basically the same airplane, it’s got a little taller tail, it’s got bigger engines and it had two jet engines mount on it, the same kind that the B-47s had and then it’s got these reel pods out on the wing tips, one on each wing tip and one in the tail. And so you, when you’re riding in it, you’re in a seat with a great big blister on the side of you, so you can lean outside the airplane and see underneath and behind you, in front of you and everything, but still be inside in a pressurized airplane. It was usually when you went to high altitudes if you were sitting on a sunny side with the sun coming in the blister, you were really comfortable. If you’re sitting…any night flying, you used to freeze to death back there, there just wasn’t enough heat and the heater just wouldn’t, we’d go out like at George Air Force Base when we’re TDY out there and we’d be carrying our heavy jackets and everything, it would be a hundred degrees outside, but we’d be carrying our heavy jackets out to go on a night flight and everybody’d be laughing at us, you know what are you doing carrying all those heavy stuff, if they only knew, you know we’d get up there and freeze to death. But the
airplane – you couldn’t carry passengers, you could carry a few but you know it would be one or two people in the back. You had a tunnel that carried, that you had to climb through to get to the front end of the airplane that went over the bomb bays and the bomb bays were just big fuel tanks. It was a very smooth airplane, it had these 4360 engines, which is 4360 cubic inch displacement engines, 28 cylinders, and they were very smooth. The other thing that really surprised me, when I first heard an engine start and in the movies every time an engine started you always hears this whine as it started to turn, so I’m expecting this whine and there’s no noise at all, just the prop starts turning and I was amazed, I said, ‘What happened to the starter,’ but it’s really a smooth airplane. Of course when they start up the old recips, all that oil that lays in the bottom cylinders starts to heat up and burn and then comes out the tailpipe as this gray smoke so when you’d start up ten tankers at one time it would go instrument flight rules, you couldn’t see anything, just tons of smoke. It was a great airplane to fly on.

RV: Okay, how many weeks were you there at Eglin?

KK: I was at England Air Force Base.

RV: Oh, England, sorry.

KK: Yes, I was at England Air Force Base for five years. Yes, I re-enlisted in flight, 18000 feet over Texas.

RV: Oh, really?

KK: Yes.

RV: Okay. Why did you re-enlist, was it just because of the enjoyable experience of flying?

KK: Oh, yes I loved the job. I just, I was going to stay forever and so I loved the job. I re-enlisted and I was going to get my first thirty-day leave, it was the one time that they couldn’t fool with you because every time I asked for a thirty-day leave they’d say, ‘No, you can have a week, or you can have two weeks,’ but that would be it. So this was a guaranteed thirty day leave, I got home, I was home for twenty days and then Kennedy came on television and the Cuban Missile Crisis, got the call, ‘Return to base now.’ So I had to drive all the way across the country back to England and they flew me, we got the KB-50 and flew to Eglin, Florida, and got there and they says, ‘No, you’re not, you
haven’t been here on all the briefings and everything, so this crew take another airplane
and go back.’ And that’s, they recalled me for nothing and I was really upset.

RV: That was your missile crisis experience?

KK: Yes, that was my initial one. Later on they shut down the KB-50s and what
was happening is when SAC started closing down all the KC-97s, which were their in-
flight refueling tankers and they were going to KC-135s which they didn’t need as many
of them, their flight crews were getting grounded and I saw that happening and I knew
we were going to start closing down the KB-50s and I said, ‘Gee, I don't want to get
grounded, I love flying,’ and I made the biggest mistake of my life then. As they came
out and said they wanted people to volunteer as loadmasters. So I says, ‘Well, that’s a
flying position, by gosh I’ll sign up for it,’ and I did and I should have never done that
because every one of the guys in my squadron that didn’t sign up for loadmasters went on
to KC-135s, and that really upset me.

RV: And this was going into the C-130?

KK: Yes, I went to the C-130 there.

RV: When was this in your career?

KK: That was, well that was five years into it.

RV: That was ’64 then.

KK: Yes, ’64.

RV: Okay, let me ask you a couple questions going back to Lackland and
Sheppard, how much contact did you have with your family?

KK: With my family at home?

RV: Yes, sir.

KK: Oh, I wrote to him quite often and every time I had a leave I’d go home.

RV: How did they feel about you being in the service and then re-enlisting?

KK: They seemed to go along with it fine. Once I there, they saw that I liked and
yes they…no problem at all.

RV: Okay, and going through this ’58, ’59, all the way to ’64, how much did you
keep up with what was going on in the world? I know that you had to, to an extent, being
in the Air Force and you mentioned the Cuban Missile Crisis in ’62, but how much were
you aware of what the United States was beginning to do in Southeast Asia?
KK: I was quite aware of it and the reason being when I was, I remember in about '63, '62, '63, one of my friends was fluent in Chinese, but he wasn't Chinese, he just, one of these guys that picked up a language and he just loved it and he was a mechanic and he was a real good mechanic. He was a staff sergeant. And he came up to me and he says, ‘They’re going to transfer me.’ And I said, ‘Oh, where you going?’ He says, ‘I’m going to someplace called Vietnam,’ and he says ‘They’re giving $200 to go out and buy civilian clothes because I’m not to be in uniform when I’m there.’ So, that’s when I found out about the advisors over there and the funny thing about it is, before I joined the Air Force, I never even read the paper. I couldn’t have told you what was going on across the street, let alone what was going on in Germany or any place else and when I joined the Air Force and when I was in Basic training Operation DOUBLE TROUBLE came up, that was the shelling of Matsu and Quemoy, and also the problem over in Berlin at the same time. So the drill instructors told us something about it and when I got out of Basic, from then on I listened to the news, read the paper, and knew what was going on around the world all the time and made a habit of it.

RV: How did you feel about the United States being involved over in Southeast Asia? This is before you went, obviously?

KK: Yes, before I went I was all for it. I thought we’re helping out a country to try and keep the Chinese and the Russians from gaining too much territory over there and I thought that was quite the deal. I thought we’re going to send advisors and those people and that was fine with me. So, I was all for it.

RV: Okay, how about the people you were serving with, did they have the same kind of feeling?

KK: Yes, I think they pretty much felt the same way. I didn’t see any, there was no discontent about it, especially during the advisor phase of ’62, ’63. When I went to troop carrier, in ’64 I first went to Vietnam and ’64 is when they started the buildup and we were in Okinawa, TDY.

RV: This is, you’re on the C-130 by this time.

KK: On the C-130 and we were in Okinawa and we brought the Marine Hawk Missile Battery down to Da Nang and that was my first trip down. We were, they were going to try and protect Da Nang at the time, so we went down and took the missile
battery down, so that was the first actual military movement where the U.S. was going to get involved. And then when we got back, of course they says, okay, now we’re going to give you the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal because you went to Vietnam. I said, ‘Boy, that really was a lot of work.’ Of course we didn’t see anything going on or anything, it was just positioning stuff, so we were thrilled about that. And then as it started to build up we pretty much, our TDY pretty much changed to Nha Trang, Vietnam which was the Special Forces base and so we spent a lot of time in Vietnam and there was a couple of good things I really liked about it is we, we were carrying chow all over the country, so we were supplying the divisions out in the field and since we’re temporary duty down there, we worked a deal with the mess hall. They says, ‘You know you got all these guys we can’t, we’re having a hard time feeding everybody and time for you and everything and you guys are working all these lousy off hours and everything, so we really can’t accommodate you when you want.’ ‘That’s good, give us a letter that says we have non-availability of these meals.’ So they did and we took that back to Okinawa, so they paid us per diem for meals. Of course we’re carrying all the food in the country, so we haul a refrigerator down to our barracks there and we had it loaded up, we went to the mess hall and worked a deal that we could put all our food that we swiped into their cold storage and they gave us the cold storage space, so we had it pretty well made.

RV: So you would take the food that you were carrying around, take little bits enough?

KK: Yes, take, you know but, and then every, I think it was every Thursday or Friday we’d take, oh it was pallets full of steaks to one of these divisions that would have a steak dinner so we’d take one case and then when we had enough cases stored up, we would have an open house, we’d have a big barbecue, we’d set it up outside our barracks and we’d invite everybody on base, Special Forces, officers, everything.

RV: This is at Nha Trang?

KK: This was at Nha Trang, yes. So they’d all come down, the officers, everybody, the officers usually bring the beer and everything and we’d have a good old time, have a big picnic.

RV: Did anybody ever say anything to you guys about this?

KK: Nobody said anything.
RV: Pretty good deal.

KK: It was great, yes, we had it made. I really enjoyed that.

RV: Let me ask you a couple of questions before we continue with that. Tell me about the C-130. We didn’t really talk about you transitioning into that aircraft; what were your specific duties and tell me a little bit about the airplane.

KK: Well, loadmaster is basically the guy that computes the weight and balance of the airplane is also the person that does the air drops when you drop paratroopers or you drop cargo or anything else, you might shove the cargo out by hand or you might use an extraction system that pulls it out and you’re sitting there with a little handle, emergency release to drop the load if you have to and you get involved in rigging some of it. So we went to on the job training school is what happened, we went to Dyess Air Force Base, Texas; they put us in an OJT program to learn to be a loadmaster. It was a very short course, but here again I was still very motivated because it was a flying job and I pretty much knew airplanes, so the C-130 was a great airplane; I mean it had great engines on it and it was brand new. When we were getting them, they were six hours old; they had only come right off the assembly line so they were brand new airplanes and everything and it was kind of nice. So I took to the job right away, learned it quickly. We did a lot of local stuff where we’d drop these…oh, it’s a little bundle about oh, maybe two hundred pounds and you would, had its own parachutes and what you’d do is you would open the ramp from the door in the back and then you’d put your parachute on, you’d go back there and sit with your legs hanging over the ramp and then when the green light came on, you’d just shove it out.

RV: Now were you, were you strapped in?

KK: We would hook up a deal to the floor while we’re sitting back there. And we’d, we were living in a trailer park right off the base so the airplanes would be flying right alongside the trailer park so I could sit there and wave to my wife as I went by.

RV: Really?

KK: Yes, it was fun.

RV: Now that didn’t scare you being back there sitting at the edge?

KK: Oh, no, nope and never had a worry at all about it, so I really enjoyed that.

Then we go off to Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, and drop paratroopers and that kind of stuff,
but then what turned me is after I finished the training and it took about two months
before I was qualified as a loadmaster. From that day on I never saw home, it was TDY
from then on and that’s what turned me. I knew that there was no way that I was going to
stay in the Air Force and I made E-4 in two years flat, which was the minimum you could
make it in and I never made another stripe. When I got to the troop carrier squadron, or
the Wing, promotion cycle came around and one staff stripe for the whole wing and I
says, ‘Boy, this is telling me a lot here,’ because it was another tactical air command,
you’re at the low end of the totem pole, you don’t count. Everybody here’s in a dead-end
position and it was basically what was happening in the in-flight refueling. If you were
in a fighter squadron, the stripes came, but if you were in the in-flight refueling squadron,
nothing happened.

RV: Why is that, do you think?

KK: I don’t know, I have no idea because the turnover, like the troop carrier had
horrible turnover, I mean everybody was getting out of the service after they’d spent a
tour there, so all the vacancies were there, so you’d come in from another command and
you’d wind up there, well that was as far as you were going right there, so if you had
made tech sergeant in SAC and you came to this troop carrier squadron, that was as far as
you were going, you were done. So, but I noticed, at the time this one stripe came down
for our Wing, there was no techs, no masters and one staff stripe, when you opened the
Air Force Times, there was E-8s, E-9s, E-7s, all going to SAC because they were getting
rid of their spot promotions, they were promoting everybody, so all these tail gunners and
in-flight refueling guys in SAC, they were getting all the promotions.

RV: So you had decided, or were you deciding at that time, to get out?

KK: Once I spent, well what really did it for me is my first tour to Okinawa, they
sent us over there for let’s see, three months, so I said, ‘I can put up with three months,’
and my wife was really dejected and everything back at Dyess. When we got back to
Dyess Air Force Base after the three-month TDY, I of course got bags of laundry and
everything else and I come home, see my wife, and that night they call me. And they
says, ‘Pack your bags, you’re going to Pope Air Force Base tomorrow morning.’ I said, ‘I
just got back from a three-month TDY.’ Says, ‘Sorry, we got this exercise going on,
you’ve got to go.’ And my wife looked at me and says, ‘What in the hell are they talking
about?’ I said, ‘Well, they’re talking about me never staying in this Air Force is what they’re talking about.’ And I made up my mind, I had ten months to go or something like that, and I said, ‘That’s it, I’m out of here, I’m not staying.’

RV: Is that when you went to CCK in Taiwan?

KK: Yes, well I had nine months left to go in the Air Force, I was at Pope in North Carolina and my wife called me and I says, ‘What’s going on?’ She says, ‘You’re being transferred.’ I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ She says, ‘Well, you’re being transferred to Taiwan or some place.’ And I says, ‘How can that be, I only got nine months left in the service and you’ve got to have a year left to go on a year tour.’ She says, ‘Well, they told me you are going.’ So when I got back to Dyess, I said, ‘What’s going on?’ And they said, ‘Well, you’re being transferred.’ I says, ‘Well, I can’t be transferred, I only have nine months left in the service.’ And they says, ‘Oh no, this is a unit move and since it’s a unit move, whoever’s in the unit has to go.’ And it was the 345th Troop Carrier Squadron that was getting moved and I was in the 347th. They transferred me to the 345th and then put me on the unit move. Boy, I was pissed; you don’t get madder than that. So anyway, I went and had the nine months left to go. Of course it was transferred to CCK but we spent all our time in Vietnam, we didn’t spend any time in CCK, hardly any time at all.

RV: Well, we’ll talk about that in a little bit. Let’s go back to 1964 when you first, you go over to Okinawa and tell me about your ideas and your feelings about actually going over into Southeast Asia and going into a war zone, did you have that feeling and if you did, what did you think?

KK: Well, when I first went over it wasn’t a war zone, we just…and when I first went to Vietnam I didn’t think much of it either because we didn’t see any fighting or anything at the time. Of course we were just delivering the missiles and I thought, ‘Hey, this is great, this is what we were trained for, this is fine, do that.’ And then as I spent, after I was TDYed down to Vietnam for a long stay then we started flying into the combat zones and picked, what would happen is we’d go into places with a load of supplies, C-rations or whatever and as soon as we’d offload then they’d come out with five, ten people of the wounded and two or three bodies in the body bags. Of course we’d put the bodies down on a pallet and strap them down and the wounded guys would
get on board and some of them would be on litters and what have you and they’d usually have a corpsmen going along with them, and these guys would be in really bad shape. And I always thought, this is going to happen to somebody else, never happen to me but that’s the typical teenager or young person, after how else could they get us into the Army. But anyway I thought, you know its always going to happen to somebody else but never to me and of course I’m flying, I’m not going to get involved in this. Then one day we were taking off of Nha Trang and right out of the center of town, a bunch of .50 caliber tracers were coming up at us. And I saw that and of course we all ducked behind the glass, like that aluminum was going to stop them and I was amazed at how fast they came at you. Because I’d have seen them in the movies going the other direction, but I’ve never seen them coming towards you and I was amazed at how fast they were coming and what really amazed me is how the guy kept missing us, he never hit us.

RV: Was this your first experience with…?

KK: That was my first experience of seeing fire coming my way and we made a tight turn out of there and called the base and told them what was happening and we were going in a formation, so they turned all the rest of the airplanes to take off the other direction. And that was the day when we got to Nha Trang, or to Tuy Hoa, that we’d lost the other airplane. What happened is we, we went in and offloaded our stuff and you had to make a real steep approach and Tuy Hoa was brand new at the time, it was an ARVN base, all Vietnamese in there. We were moving the Koreans in and we were taking a lot of the ARVN out and there was a helicopter outfit there and I had 30000 pounds of C-rations on board and the guys I rode out to the airplane with that day, on their airplane they had a load of fifty-five gallon drums of JP-4. So when I got to Tuy Hoa we made our offload, we took off and then as we were leaving we heard that the other guy got shot down off the end of the runway, and he was seven miles out and he blew up in mid-air, so the ground fire got him evidently.

RV: Was this during your first deployment over?

KK: This was, yes, it was, first or second, it was probably my second deployment, so that’s when I realized it was coming our way, still had a very positive attitude toward the war that we were going to go in there, Johnson kept moving more troops in and more
troops in, I said, ‘Good, we’re going to win this thing,’ but my mind got changed later, after I got to looking back at it.

RV: But during your experience there, you were?

KK: During my experience there, and don’t forget I was in the ’64, ’65, and ’66, first part of the war, thought that they were moving enough troops in there that we were going to kick some butt and win this thing and you know, didn’t realize what was going on, basically didn’t realize that these guys were trying to hold positions and not go after the enemy. I’ll never forget, I was in Vietnam one day and I heard the Armed Forces radio says, ‘And the B-52s were involved in dropping bombs,’ and I said, ‘What, these guys don’t know anything about airplanes.’ I thought it must have been B-66s or fighter bombers or some sort of thing but B-52s wouldn’t be over here droppings bombs, you guys don’t know anything. And I didn’t realize that actually it was B-52s doing it. But I was amazed there that they used them and then of course when I got to…down in Guam I saw them loading the B-52s and everything, and that amazed me, the amount of bombs they were putting on those things.

RV: What was your first impression, when you flew into Da Nang that first time, what was your first impression of Vietnam, the country?

KK: I thought it was one of the prettiest places I have ever seen in my life. It was, it’s very green, a lot of jungle all the way up but then had the whitest beaches that you ever saw and then this emerald green water out there going out until it turns into the blue, so it was just absolutely gorgeous and I thought that right off the bat. I says, ‘My gosh, this place is beautiful,’ until you get out of the airplane.

RV: What did you think when you got out of the airplane?

KK: ‘Boy is this place hot.’ It is the hottest place you could think of. Well, the Philippines was actually hotter but it was miserable. I really, from the air it was gorgeous and I couldn’t think of a prettier place.

RV: Well during your first deployment over to Okinawa and then flying in and out of Vietnam, were you ever stationed in Vietnam for any period of time or did you guys come in, stay over night and then go back to Okinawa or what?

KK: When we first started it was mostly just over night. We went to, like we went into Saigon and we’d go down to a hotel, stay the night and then leave. We went
into Da Nang, stayed the night and left and when we first went to Nha Trang is when we started staying.

RV: Okay, okay. Tell me what your impressions were of the Vietnamese people.

KK: Didn’t know any of them. We were pretty much to ourselves, when we carried Vietnamese soldiers couldn’t speak to them, none of them spoke English and we kind of treated them like cattle, it was terrible.

RV: Really?

KK: Well we had to, because they had to move large amounts of troops in different places. Now, a C-130, when you fully rigged it for passengers, the max you could put on there was like ninety and that was troops, and it would be sixty if you were carrying paratroopers. So when we carried Vietnamese we’d carry two hundred and by not rigging any seats and what we’d do is open the ramp and door, we’d march them all in there and pack them in as far and we’d close the ramp and door and then you go around to the front and then you move them all back up into the tail and start loading more through the front door until you got, and they’d all be standing on takeoff. Now, this wouldn’t be legal in anybody’s Air Force but you know it was a combat situation and they had to move these troops and they had to get them there now, so that’s the way they did it.

RV: What was your impression of the Vietnamese troops?

KK: I didn’t – I never saw them fight so I didn't have much of an impression at all. All I’d see them, I didn’t have an impression really.

RV: Were they friendly to you guys, or…?

KK: Well, they didn’t speak to us because they couldn’t speak English and I couldn’t speak Vietnamese so it was just hand signals and what have you, same as the Koreans.

RV: What was your impression of them?

KK: I thought that they were, well I hauled a lot of Koreans in and out of combat situations and I hauled a lot of their bodies back, so I had a lot of respect for them. The one respect I did is we had an airplane, we flew into Nha Trang and we had some equipment that belonged to the Koreans on board and they had one Korean soldier there that was with it and when we landed at Nha Trang, they told us just leave the airplane and
head out and get something to eat. So we left the airplane there and then it was like two
or three days, I think it was about three days before we went back to that airplane and the
airplane hadn’t flown. When we got back there, that Korean soldier was still there and he
didn’t speak English and I was wondering, ‘Boy, I wonder why they have him still out
here guarding this and everything.’ So I had a C-ration deal and he pointed at it and
asked you know like could he have it. And he sat down and he wolfed that thing down
and I got to thinking, ‘Gee, I wonder if this guy’s been off the airplane in three days.’ So
I went out and I asked one of the officers, I said, ‘Can you get ahold of somebody that
can speak Korean?’ So they did, they went and they got this Korean officer out there and
he came over there and he was shocked, the guy had been on the airplane for three days,
never was relieved and never moved. And from that point on, I respected the heck out of
them.

RV: Tell me what your impressions were of these different cities you flew in and
out of, you say you would stay in Saigon occasionally when you flew out of?

KK: Well we stayed in Saigon a couple of times and it was very early in the war
and we were free to walk around anywhere you want and of course we had our pistols on
and all that stuff and I remember walking into a shoe shop and it had these Siamese
looking shoes with the curly fronts and it was sandals and I said, ‘Gee, I’m going to buy
that for my wife.’ So the guy spoke English and he says, ‘Good,’ and he says, ‘What
size?’ Well, I pulled my wife’s card out and I had her shoe size there and I told him, and
he said, ‘Let’s see, that’s American,’ so he went to his list and he went up and its an
American size, he says, ‘ooh, big feet’ and I told my wife that later on when I gave them
to her, compared to the Asians it was big feet. We stayed at a hotel; I only think I went
into Saigon twice.

RV: Did you have good experiences there?

KK: Yes, I had great experiences there. There was no fighting going on in town
or anything at that time, so it was easy; it was just like going to any other town.

RV: This is during your first TDY?

KK: Yes.

RV: What did you guys do for entertainment during this time period?

KK: Drank, that’s all I did.
RV: In Vietnam or in Okinawa?

KK: Oh, anywhere I was at. The first trip into Nha Trang, this is when we were going to finally stay there, one of my buddies led in, he went in the day before so they had put him on a flight and it was carrying, actually a whole aircraft load of beer to some club someplace and of course he absconded with about three cases of it and when he got back to Nha Trang, he went, it was all hot, so he went over to the Special Forces Club and he says, ‘I got three cases of hot beer,’ and he says, ‘I’d like to trade it for some cold beer if I could.’ And the guys says, ‘I’ll tell you what, I’ll give you a garbage can full of ice, how’s that?’ And he says, ‘Oh, okay,’ so they gave him the garbage can full of ice and he brought it to the barracks and he had all the beer in there and they told him that he had the next day off and then I showed up and . So I walked in just as he had the beer all iced down and everything, so I call up and they said, ‘What are we doing tomorrow,’ and he says, ‘Well, you’re off tomorrow.’ I said ‘Okay,’ so I sat there and I drank beer with him until about midnight and I just…we must have really been soused by the time we got done and I went to bed and at six o’clock in the morning they come and got me up and I was deathly sick and I says, ‘What’s going on?’ And he says, ‘Well, you’ve got to go fly.’ I said, ‘Oh, you’ve got to be kidding.’ So I got dressed, got my flying suit on and everything and I’m waiting for the duty crew to pick me up, take me out to the airplane and I’m really ill and as the duty crew guy came and picked me up he shakes my buddy that was on the top bunk there and he says, ‘Get ready, you’re flying next.’ And I said, ‘Now, it’s worth it,’ so anyway, that was my first day.

RV: Okay, what did you think about the alcohol consumption in Vietnam, was it too much, was that the drug of choice basically?

KK: Well, see I didn’t see the Army guys at all, the Air Force guys, we drank a lot of beer but it was usually after a flight, it wasn’t before a flight, nobody went out and flew drunk or anything like that. We’d come off a flight and it would be hotter than Hades and you know you go into the club and that first beer would go down so fast that you couldn’t see straight and then you’d spend the rest of the night there, if you had the time off. If not you’d have two or three beers and you’d go home.

RV: Now, was this the Special Forces club at?
KK: Yes, Special Forces club so it was open to everybody, officers, enlisted, yes it wasn’t a typical officers’ club, NCO club or any of that stuff.

RV: What about drug use?

KK: Didn’t see any, never used it myself and I always am so thankful that I grew up when I did. Because I was one of these guys, ooh cigarettes, I started smoking when I was in sixth grade. Alcohol I drank when I was in the sixth grade; if drugs were available I would have been on drugs, I know it, so I was so thankful that they weren’t that available when I was a kid.

RV: Why do you say that you would be on them?

KK: Since I would have tried anything, I was stupid.

RV: So you didn’t see any drug use when you were in Vietnam?

KK: No.

RV: Tell me about base life at Nha Trang; I take it your first tour you kind of flew in, flew out of the country a number of times and you never had one base of operations?

KK: Right, Nha Trang became our first base of operations, but every time we went since then, we stayed at Nha Trang.

RV: Okay, what was it like there?

KK: It was a pretty nice base because it was, we had good barracks, we had a house boy that would be in there, it was an open bay barracks but the house boy would shine your shoes and stuff, so we’d all throw money in the pot for that.

RV: This was a Vietnamese houseboy.

KK: Yes, and then we had our own food and everything there, so we’d cook our own breakfast and everything before we go and it was, I really didn’t mind it all. The fact of being away from my family was the only thing I really hated. Since we were in a combat situation, we didn’t have all these training flights and all that crap, we weren’t going to get standboard check rides and all that kind of stuff because we were now doing the job we were trained to do. So we felt like we were doing the job we were trained to do and we did it.

RV: Were your barracks air-conditioned?

KK: Yes.

RV: Okay, and how many men were living in there?
KK: Oh probably, maybe a hundred.
RV: And these are all C-130 crews?
KK: Yes.
RV: What kind of relationship did you guys from with each other?
KK: Well, with our own individual crew we were pretty close, but it was nothing like the in-flight refueling squadron. The in-flight refueling squadron, we were a tight-knit unit, we were one of four squadrons in the Wing but we were on a base by our self, so we were a very close unit and in those days we had, our squadron patch was pointed on our airplanes and we wore our squadron patch so when we get with the other squadrons we would pretty much really be a tight knit unit and then when Sweeney came along and took over TAC, he made us get rid of all our squadron patches and put the TAC patch on the airplanes and TAC patches on our uniforms, so instead of being a member of a small group, now you’re a member of this gigantic tactical air command, which you could have cared less about, so I think Sweeney was really wrong in that regard. I didn’t think it at the time but I think it now and I didn’t have much respect for the guy. He was more into one of the, he was kind of like an accountant, everything was done by numbers.
RV: Was he there at Nha Trang?
KK: No, he was tactical air command when I was still at the 622nd Air Refueling Squadron and then when we went into C-130s we were sill just part of TAC so it was no big deal any more, the squadrons didn’t mean anything, Wing didn’t mean anything, so the only thing that meant anything was the crew.
RV: So you guys lived together, did you have your bunks together?
KK: Well the officers always were separate, no matter where we stayed except in a bad situation. One day we took off out of Da Nang and we lost an engine on takeoff so when he shut down the engine, he says ‘Well, I’m going back to Da Nang,’ and we’re fifteen minutes away from Nha Trang and I screamed, I said ‘Don’t turn around, just keep going.’ He said, ‘Oh, no,’ he said, ‘They saw the engine shut down.’ And the engineer, he sat there and he grumbled a little bit. Well we went back and of course there’s no engines and you’re going to be there for a week, and what did they have? They had a tent and they put our whole crew in the tent, it was 105 degrees outside,
ninety-right percent humidity and there’s a trailer right next to us with the fighter pilots in it with the air conditioner running all night long. And we’re sitting in a puddle of sweat and finally my aircraft commander turned around and he says, ‘Boy, were you right. I should have never turned around.’ So we spent the week there and waited for the engine change.

RV: Did you guys feel like you had enough supplies?

KK: Oh, we had, well everything, anything we wanted, we had.

RV: Even at base camp you felt like you could get what you wanted?

KK: Right.

RV: How about food?

KK: Oh, always had plenty of food.

RV: Right, you told me about your system.

KK: Yes.

RV: Now, didn’t anybody check the manifest to see what was missing or not missing? Did you have those kinds of things?

KK: We had manifests but everything was in pallets and nobody counted.

RV: So you could take, okay, you could take stuff off the pallet and then cover it back up and it was a pallet.

KK: Yes, it was still a pallet and don’t forget when you’re going into a combat base, you know you’re dumping these things off and leaving right now, so they’re not sitting there and counting this stuff in. They’re saying, ‘Here, dump your load and get out of here, right now, because they’re shooting at the perimeter.’

RV: Right, right. Now, when you guys would do the dumps, did you do this in air or would you land?

KK: We all, everything I did in Vietnam was air land; I never made an air drop anywhere there.

RV: Okay, tell me what your typical day was like, if you had one.

KK: Oh, yeah. Well most of it was very long. You’d start out early in the morning and you’d…all the flights in Vietnam were like thirty minutes at the most and so what you’d do is you, you’d load a load, you’d fly to the next base, you’d offload it,
you’d pick up wounded or whatever and fly them back, then you’d pick up another load, you’d fly it to the next base and you could do up to eleven or twelve in one day.

RV: Were these considered eleven or twelve separate missions or was this a fling?

KK: Yes, they’d all be separate sorties so I know one day, the worst day we had is, I had I think it was about fourteen flights in one day and we were down to the last flight and I was really, really ragged. And we had to go from one base to fifteen minutes away to the next base and we’re picking up some vehicles and ten Marines. So I got the vehicles all loaded down and tied down and it’s hotter than Hades there. There was not enough seats for the Marines, so I had to go in there and rig all these stanchions and put seats down, and then we got to offload I’d have to take them all down and re-pack them away. So I went up to this Marine gunnery sergeant that was with them and I said, ‘Sarge, we got fifteen minutes to fly,’ I said, ‘Would you mind if some of your troops just sat on the floor?’ And he says, ‘No, no problem at all.’ I said, ‘Okay.’ So I didn’t break the stanchions and I had just the side seats so they got on, they had this first lieutenant and he got in and sat in one of the seats and then all the rest and then he sat all the privates down on the floor. And we took off and one of the privates turned around, he said something to the lieutenant, ‘You know it’s a sorry deal we have to sit here on the floor,’ and the lieutenant started to say something and the gunnery sergeant, he just put his fingers to his lips like, ‘Shh,’ and the lieutenant shut up and nothing was said, so I was really happy about that.

RV: So continue with your typical day, you would…

KK: Okay, then at the end of that day the last flight we got in, we had no load, so they told us go back home and we should have fueled up, but the pilot was in a big hurry, we were all in a hurry, you know the day was coming to and end, it was hot and we took off and headed back home and I looked up and there wasn’t enough fuel to make it. So by the time we got to our home base all the low pressure lights, the low warning lights were all on and it looked like a pinball machine up there on the engineer’s panel, fuel panel and when we landed we had a – normally four thousand pounds was minimum fuel, you had to be on the ground with four thousand pounds. We had 150 pounds when we landed, so it was a horrible situation. We thought we weren’t going to make it.

RV: What kind of cargo would you carry?
KK: Oh, we’d carry everything. We’d carry C-ration, POL drums, trucks. We’d carry troops, just – you name, it we hauled it.

RV: What was the strangest thing you think you ever carried?

KK: Well, strangest.

RV: Or something that stands out in your mind that you carried?

KK: Well, I remember I had a big battle one day, can I put you on hold a second I have….

RV: Absolutely. Okay, go ahead sir.

KK: Okay, we went into Cam Ranh Bay to take a load to Tuy Hoa and Tuy Hoa at the time was a real short runway and we’re going to make an assault landing on it, which means we had to stop real quick, so we went in to Cam Ranh Bay to pick it up and they parked us next to this big load and it went out with a two and a half ton truck, a trailer for it, a weapons carrier and a trailer for it and ten troops. So it was going to be a full load.

RV: And how much could you carry in general, what was your…?

KK: About thirty thousand pounds. And, so I went out and looked at the truck and I said, ‘Okay, it will all fit,’ we knew it could fit so I went around to the back of the truck and it had a placard on the front that said twenty-seven thousand pounds. So I went around to the back of the truck, this one inch armor plating about oh, two feet thick, which is solid steel. I said, ‘That’s got to be crazy,’ I says, ‘Twenty-seven thousand pounds? This truck probably weighs twenty-seven thousand pounds.’ So I went out to this staff sergeant that was there, he was the aerial port squadron guy and I said, ‘Did you guys weigh this load?’ He said, ‘Oh, all the loads are weighed.’ I said, ‘Did you weigh this load?’ He says, ‘I’m sure they did.’ I said, ‘Well, I’ll tell you what,’ I said ‘That twenty-seven thousand pounds has got to be for this truck and that trailer,’ I says, ‘You can’t add the weapons carrier back there and that into it.’ He says, ‘Oh, no, that’s got to be the whole load.’ And I said, ‘No, it can’t be, not with that armored plating back there.’ And so I said, ‘Unless you can prove to me that you weighed this whole load, I’m not going to take this whole load. I’ll take the truck and the trailer.’

RV: Now was this your call completely?
KK: Yes, this is my call because I’m the loadmaster. So, he says, ‘Well, you’re going to have to take it,’ and I said, ‘No, I’m not going to take it.’ So he went off and they, this Air Force lieutenant came back out there and he grabbed a hold of me and says, ‘What’s this deal?’ And I showed him; I said, ‘Can you prove that you weighed this?’ He says, ‘Well, we weighed it.’ And I says, ‘I don’t care, I want you to prove it.’ He says, ‘Oh, no, we weighed it.’ I said, ‘Well, I’m not taking it, I’ll take the truck and the trailer, that’s it.’ And he said, ‘Well, you’ve got to take it.’ And I said, ‘No, I’m not going to take it.’ So he went off and this Army full colonel shows up and I says, ‘Boy, now they’re really sending….’ And he come up to me and he says, ‘I want you to take that load.’ And I said, ‘Colonel, I’m not going to take the load, I’m going into a very short runway, I may not get stopped if I have too much weight on board and I don’t think that load’s correct.’ So he went out and he left and the next thing I know the lieutenant comes back. Well, before the lieutenant got there, this little captain that was flying my airplane came around and said, ‘What’s going on, how come we’re not loading?’ And I told him, so he went over and he looked at it and he was standing behind the airplane when this lieutenant come back and the lieutenant says, ‘You are going to carry this load,’ and the captain went up and grabbed him right by the shoulder and he says, ‘Look, you don’t have to crash and burn in this airplane, so you just get your ass out of here.’ And the lieutenant left and the next thing you know the sergeant showed back up and he says, ‘Take whatever part of the load you want to load,’ so I says, ‘Well, I’ll take the two and a half ton truck and the trailer and I’ll take the ten troops because they all have weapons, because I’m not going to fight anybody off with this .38.’ So we left it, the weapons carrier and its trailer there. So we loaded up and we went out to the runway and we computed the takeoff for the weight we had and what he did is he went down the runway and let it fly itself off the ground to see it if we were close and we were still heavy because when we went down the runway he says, ‘We still took too much runway to take off,’ but we made the stop at Tuy Hoa and got it all off.

RV: Did you have to go back and get the rest of the stuff?

KK: No, uh-huh, that was left for somebody else. And the thing that used to make me the maddest about that is a load would come in for Nha Trang and it would come in on a Military Airlift Command C-130, be five pallets and they would not land at
Nha Trang. They would land at Cam Ranh Bay and then they’d make us fly our C-130 over there to pick up the five pallets and bring it back to Nha Trang.

RV: Why did this happen?

KK: Well, military airlift command treated themselves like airlines do, unless the pilot has been certified at that airport, we don’t go and I’m sitting there thinking what kind of a combat outfit is this, if you’ve got to be certified before you can go into a combat zone, this is ridiculous. Of course we’d go in anywhere, all our regulations were always waived.

RV: What cargo stands out in your mind, was there anything that was particularly, something you guys liked to carry all the time and I guess that might be steaks?

KK: No, I didn’t care too much to carry the steaks and stuff. I liked carrying C-rations because they were all boxed up real nice, the pallets were nice and square, easy to tie down, the pallets just locked right in the airplane and I really liked carrying them.

RV: What was the most difficult thing to carry?

KK: Ah, difficult, bombs, bombs were the most difficult, the 750s. They come on without fins but they’re so heavy and you had to chain them down with those big chains and they would, if you got into turbulence they’d try and break themselves loose from the chains because you really didn’t have anything to chain to, you were just going across; they were the worst.

RV: Did this make you guys nervous?

KK: Well one of our crews, one of the bombs got loose on it and when it got loose, it rolled in and broke the chain on the second bomb and he was back there scrambling with straps trying to tie it down and he was coming in from the Philippines, so he told me about that so the first time I got bombs on there, I made darn sure they were down good.

RV: You’d said that you carried bodies and also wounded soldiers, how did you deal with death and seeing that so close up?

KK: That, yes I usually sat there in the back of the airplane looking straight at the bodies and wondering about, gee, there’s some mother or wife back home that’s waiting on this guy and I felt really bad about it. I didn’t think about the war or anything else, I just thought about the guy and the wounded guys, that was some of the worst I ever saw.
We’d pick them up at Saigon, at the main hospital there and take them to Clark because they had the bigger hospital and they would have a nurse on board and everything and these guys would be, ones that were, they’d have them between two stretchers so they could roll them. They’d be with broken spines and all kinds of stuff and I’d see that and just, you know that was devastating.

RV: How did you deal with that?

KK: Well, just looked at, you know just, you never thought about it happening to yourself but you just thought, I just thought very sad, the bodies I was always sad for the wife and the mother or whoever was left at home. The wounded, the ones that really looked back, the ones we were doing the rotations to and stuff, I looked at that and said, ‘Gee, if that was me, I think I’d rather be dead.’

RV: How often did you carry the wounded and dead?

KK: It was quite often, the dead mostly. The wounded I didn’t carry that much but I carried a lot of dead. We carried them at a bad time, there’s the job I always thought was the worst job in the whole world would be a guy that was running a morgue in Saigon because we were picking up bodies that were out in the heat in a bag for two, three days before we’d get to them. We’d get them on board and they’d stink to high heaven and that was in a sealed bad. When they got to the morgue they had to open those bags and just – ew, that has got to be horrible.

RV: What would you guys do about the smell?

KK: Just live with it, not much you could do. You spray some stuff in the airplane after you got them off, but some of the airplanes stunk pretty much, especially if you got a bag that leaked, then the airplane stunk forever.

RV: Did you wash out the airplane from time to time?

KK: Yes, we’d wash it out as best we could.

RV: Were you ever shot at; you described the .50 cal tracers?

KK: Yes, that’s the only time I know of that I was shot at.

RV: So you don’t remember taking rounds in the plane or anything like that?

KK: No.

RV: So were you ever wounded at all?

KK: No.
RV: How would you describe the enemy? I mean you had just that one I guess experience and couldn’t see them, but what were your impressions of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army, if you had any?

KK: I don’t think I had any, I really don’t think I had any impressions of them at all at the time.

RV: Looking back at it, do you have any impressions of them?

KK: Oh, if I got some looking back at it different. When I left there and I was back in the States, you know I remembered my experiences there and the buildup, but then after, oh it was about 1970, I got to looking at it and I says, ‘What are we doing over there? I thought we were over there to win a war and now it looks like another Korea where we’re going to sit there and try and hold the line or we’re going to try and hold some area but not go after the guy.’ And I got to where I hated Lyndon Johnson, I just got so mad at the guy I couldn’t see straight for getting us in there without a plan to win it and then when Nixon got in, I said. ‘Well, now we’re going to do something,’ and boy, when I saw him sit around do nothing, then I really got pissed off about it. Because I thought, you know, this is crazy, who in the heck goes into the battle just to lose, you know all you’re doing is creating casualties for yourself; you’re not gaining anything. And you know if, and then years later when I read about Lyndon Johnson saying that he wasn’t going to be the first president to lose a war, that really did it for me. He made my list as the worst president in history over that one. And I didn’t have a lot of liking for Nixon either after he didn’t do anything about it and then finally at the very end when he finally unleashed the B-52s on Haiphong and Hanoi, at least, that’s something they should have done on day one if they were going to fight a war, so I had a lot of bad feelings about Vietnam.

RV: Now, during your time there did you have anything of this sort going through your head?

KK: None, because I thought we were going in there to win. I saw the buildup coming and I just knew, ‘Hey, we’re going to put enough troops in here to win this thing,’ but they never did go to where they should to win it.

RV: We’ll spend some time talking about your opinions of the war a bit later, let me ask you a couple other questions about your in country experiences. You said you
made combat landings, describe how you would typically go into different fields and how
the C-130 would function going in.

KK: Okay, well normally when you go into a combat case you knew you had a lot
of ground fire to deal with, so instead of making a normal landing like you see airplanes
do every day what we would do is we get in fairly close to the base and make a steep,
very steep final approach. Then when you got to the runway you pretty much slammed it
on the deck like you do, like carrier planes landing, there’s no rounding out or anything
you just hit all three gears at the same time and just go to max reverse on the props and
get it stopped as quick as you can and if you’re on a dirt strip then you don’t see anything
for awhile because all the dust gets kicked up in front of you. Then what you normally
do is you go out to a point right off the edge of the runway, open up the airplane, slam
everything out onto the ground as fast as you can and then go back down the runway and
take off.

RV: How long would this take usually?
KK: Oh, you could do it in ten minutes.
RV: Wow. Where were you actually sitting on the airplane?
KK: Normally I could sit up front, there was a bench behind the pilot, copilot and
navigator or you could just sit back up there and if you were doing that. If I was carrying
passengers or I was carrying bodies or something like that I’d usually stay in the back.
RV: How did the C-130 hold up on these hard landings?
KK: Oh, it seemed, it was a truck. Yes, it really held up good.
RV: What kind of relationship did you have with the pilot?
KK: Very close, copilots I didn’t know that much but the pilot, aircraft
commander was, he was the go-to guy. I got into some trouble one time, we were in the
Philippines and we were going to spend the night and they jerked us out of Nha Trang
real fast and I didn’t cash any check or anything, so I didn’t have any money and I asked
my engineer and he says, ‘Well, I don’t have any either.’ So we got into the Philippines
and we were trying to get a hold of my pilot and he wasn't at the BOQ so we called the
officers’ club and he was there and he says, ‘We need to borrow some money from you.’
And he says, ‘Well, come on down, I’ll give it to you.’ So we got down to the officers’
club and we walked in wearing civilian clothes and we got to the front door, nobody was
checking cards so we just walked in and we saw him in the back so we went back there
and he says, ‘Sit down, sit down. Have a beer.’ So we sat down, we started having beers
with him and we spent the night, not the night, you know we had probably three or four
beers and, but we, my navigator was there and the pilot. So then when we got back to the
barracks we had a good night’s sleep and it was about ten, eleven o’clock when we were
going to leave and I went to the airplane and I picked up the coffee jugs and I was going
to go into the base flight to get the coffee jugs filled and as I was base flight I got the
coffee jugs filled and I started out the door, this little, real fat captain was standing there
and he says, ‘What were you doing in the officers’ club last night?’ I said, ‘Well, I was
invited.’ And he says, ‘You’re not supposed to be in there.’ And I said, ‘Well, I was
invited.’ He said, ‘I don’t care, you were not supposed to be in there,’ and then he started
chewing me out about it. And of course I’ve got less than five months to go in the Air
Force now and I’m getting out and could have cared less what he had to say. So anyway
I stayed there and listened to him for awhile and when he finally got done, I got on the
transport and went back to the airplane and when I got back there Oberhelmen was my
pilot and he says, ‘Where you been?’ And I says, ‘Well, this little fat captain in there, he
didn’t like the idea I was in the officers’ club last night so he was chewing me out.’ And
he says, ‘That’s it, get back in the transport.’ We got back into the bus; he says, ‘Back to
base ops,’ he says, ‘I want you to point this guy out to me.’ And he was going to grab
him about it, but anyway when we got back he wasn’t there any more, I mean that’s how
close he was though, he was great.

RV: He stood up for you.

KK: Oh he would have, he would have gotten a hold of that captain and chewed
him up one side and down the other.

RV: Did you have the same pilot, the same captain the whole time?

KK: Not the whole time but for the most part of the time I was over there, same
crew, yes.

RV: Do you keep in contact with these men at all?

KK: I’ve lost contact with the pilot, I am in contact with the engineer, and he’s the
only one. And like the navigator and the copilot, I don’t even remember their names.
RV: Did you guys ever have any experience with the medevac dustoff helicopter teams?

KK: No.

RV: Well, why don’t we pause for the day and we’ll stop and we’ll pick up a little bit later.

KK: Sounds good to me.
Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone; I’m continuing my interview with Mr. Ken Kruger. Today is February 26, 2003 and it’s about 10:32 AM Central Standard Time. Sir, let’s continue with what we were talking about yesterday, some general questions about life on base and your contact with home. Tell me about writing letters home, how much contact did you have with your wife and your parents?

Kenneth Kruger: I wrote, well what we did with my wife is, when I was over in Vietnam is we did a lot of tapes, we mailed tapes back and forth so we were talking to each other and that was, I had bought a couple of tape recorders in Okinawa when I was TDY over there and when I got back to Dyess Air Force Base, I gave her one of them and ever since then when I went on an extended TDY, it was send tapes home.

RV: Right, how often did you guys, how often did you make recordings for her?

KK: Oh, I probably made two a week, maybe sometimes three.

RV: And how long did it take for your stuff to get back to her?

KK: Sometimes it, well it went pretty quick, it would go in, since it was in first class mail it would go and be there in about a week, I guess.

RV: And for her to get her tapes to you?

KK: Same thing coming back, she’d mail to an APO address and of course everything I sent home at that time was free, you just write ‘free’ on it and of course she’d paid for her end to mail to me.

RV: Did you ever get to make any MARS calls home to her?

KK: No.

RV: How about contact with your parents?

KK: Parents, mostly my wife kept in touch with them and I’d write them a letter once in a while.

RV: Did you keep up with news from the United States?

KK: Yes, we had the Armed Forces newspaper there, Stars and Stripes, and we had the Armed Forces Radio so we’d listen to that all the time, so that was our news
source. Now, whether you got local news and stuff like that, you didn't find out anything local, it was all national issues.

RV: How about access to television and things like that?

KK: We had television over there, in Taiwan, it was all in Chinese, there was no Armed Forces but down in Vietnam we had a Armed Forces TV network, I don’t remember quite it was. I don’t remember watching much television there come to think of it. In fact I don't even know if they had it in Vietnam, in Okinawa, I mean in Taiwan it was all Chinese so it was all Chinese stuff and I felt so sorry for one of my buddies that came down with hepatitis and they had set him up in room, we didn't have a hospital there, so they set up all these chairs around there and said, ‘Nobody can pass that,’ put him in the middle, he was quarantined, so we were all over there standing at the edge talking to him and he says, ‘Yes, they’re going to have to send me to the hospital because I have hepatitis,’ and he didn’t know A, B, C or any of that stuff. So what amazed me is they gave him a train ticket and sent him right down to the Taipei, down to the railroad station to ride with everybody else to Taipei to the hospital after they quarantined him away from us. So then when he got to Taipei I saw him later and he says it was the worst in the world when he got there because they put him into isolation and the only thing he could do was watch television, it was all in Chinese, so I felt real sorry for him. So, TV I think was pretty much out.

RV: Okay, sounds like it. How about access to religious facilities, churches of access to chapels, did you have that?

KK: We had it if we wanted it, I wasn’t that religious.

RV: Did the war change your religious views at all?

KK: No.

RV: How about USO shows, did you ever get to attend any of those?

KK: No, I missed every darn one of them because I was flying and Martha Ray came many times over to the Special Forces base at Nha Trang and every time she came there, I was off someplace else. Bob Hope came and our crews flew him to different places; I didn’t, but some of our crews did, but none of us got to see him other than the crew that happened to fly him to wherever he was going.

RV: How about any R&Rs, did you get to take any of that?
KK: I didn’t take any but I was very fortunate that my aircraft commander got sick or something and they put me on with, they put me and my engineer on with a lieutenant colonel that was kind of an admin officer and they said ‘We’re going to go down to Nha Trang and we don’t know how long you’re going to be there, but we’re going to be duty crew,’ which means we were going to pick up all the troops, take them out to the airplanes and do every rotten detail there was. So we jumped in with this lieutenant colonel and we went down to Nha Trang with him and we were there for like two weeks and he says, ‘Well, we’re going to be here for quite a while’ and we said, ‘No problem, colonel, we’ll just stay here, this is fine.’ We’d fly a few missions with him but it wasn’t like the real grind that we had when we were with our own aircraft commander, and then one day we’re up flying a mission and he called us up and he says, ‘I’ve got news for you guys.’ He says, ‘We’re going to ferry an airplane back to Dyess, or back to the States,’ and I got to thinking about it and I said, ‘Whoa, wait a second, when we got back to CCK, you’ve got your own crew back there and they’re going to be wanting to go with you to the States,’ and he says, ‘Nope,’ he says, ‘they didn’t come with me down here, they didn’t volunteer to stay when you guys did, so you guys going back with me.’ So we got a, right in the middle of my tour I got to take an airplane back and we landed at Dyess and I called my wife from there.

RV: Did she know you were coming?

KK: Nope, she had no idea, and when I got to Dyess I went to some friend’s house there where we used to live and called her and she was living in Louisiana with her mother so I called her and told her I was in the States and she was shocked, but she said she had a premonition that I was coming.

RV: Really?

KK: Yes, it’s amazing. So then when I got to wherever we dropped the airplane off, I can’t even remember, it was home for a major inspection and then I commericaled over to Louisiana and we had a week off to see our family and stuff and then back to the grind.

RV: How was that little brief vacation for you?

KK: Oh, it was great. Boy, I saw so little of my wife in that last three years in the service that a week was fantastic.
RV: How did you feel having to go back over?

KK: Well, I knew I would have to go so there was nothing I could, you know I had no feeling one way or the other, I just knew I had to get it over with and I already knew I was getting out of the service so it didn’t make any difference to me.

RV: Okay, you had already made that decision.

KK: Oh, yes I’d made that decision before I went on that last PCS to CCK; I made up my mind I was getting out.

RV: Have you regretted that decision at all since then?

KK: I did for awhile after I got to and I felt really bad, here I’m missing out on my retirement all of this, but since then things have really turned out well for me, I mean I’m the president right now and there’s no way I would have ever gone on to do any of this stuff if I had stayed in the service, so I’ve very happy I did get out.

RV: Let’s go back to life with the guys, your crew and the base; did you guys listen to music a lot?

KK: No, not a lot. What we’d normally do, come out in the morning, start loading the airplane and we’d start the APU on the airplane, we’d go up to the ADF which is a kind of a radio for direction finding and we’d turn it on, get a local station, get the Armed Forces radio on there and they would have some music on there, so that, we didn't listen to a lot of it. When we were, you know, some bar or something where they have jukeboxes and it was kind of funny because before I got over there I was an Elvis Presley fan and before that I was some of the earlier rock and roll guys and they, the Beatles, came on Ed Sullivan and I hated the song that they sang and every time somebody would say, ‘What do you think of the Beatles?’ and I’d say, ‘Oh, I can’t stand them.’ So I’d be over in Vietnam listening to some song like Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds and I said, ‘Boy, I sure like that song,’ but I never know who was singing it. So one day my daughter, years later my daughter gets me this tape from the Beatles, the Best of the Beatles or whatever, and I was amazed to put it lightly, ‘Geez, I liked all those songs.’

RV: That’s interesting. I was going to ask you if you hear stuff today that takes you back to your time in Okinawa, CCK, and Vietnam?
KK: There’s a couple of them, a couple of songs that would always bring my back but my memory is so bad I can hardly remember. There was one about, there’s a house in New Orleans.

RV: Oh, *The House of the Rising Sun*.

KK: Yes, *The House of the Rising Sun*, every time I see or hear that it reminds me of being in Okinawa. I don’t know, I guess it’s because I played it on the jukebox over in Okinawa. Then there was, we were in a squadron that was really amazing. We had about six or seven people that had very famous names, we had Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, let’s see there was Willie Mays but there was about six or seven of them, but this Davy Crockett, we used to razz him all the time and when we’d go into the jukebox in Okinawa in the dining hall they had the Davy Crockett song on there.

RV: And you played it for him every time.

KK: So we never, it never got played until he walked into the mess hall, somebody would run up and drop a quarter in there and play it, sort of like *Hail to the Chief* when he walked in.

RV: Did he take all this in good humor?

KK: Yes, he did, he was quite a guy. He hated the song but he was quite a guy.

RV: I’m hearing in my mind right now. How about interactions with other races, did you guys ever have, did you see any race problems within your squadron or in general?

KK: No, I flew with several blacks and actually in Vietnam I didn’t see that many other than in the Army but when I was in the in-flight refueling squadron, the smartest guy I ever served with, another reel operator, was black and the guy was, he came in, he was a mechanic and transferred to reel operator and he got all the books out and read through them and he knew more about that airplane in two weeks than I think anybody in our squadron knew about them. And they assigned him with me for awhile as a crew member and his name was Padilla and we were getting the check ride so they had these two standboard guys to get on board and they usually asked you some questions and then they watch how you do your job and everything and they got in, they asked me a simple one and I answered it, it was one of these standard ones that you got every time. They turned around and they started asking Padilla questions and he answered every one of
them, so we took off, got in flight and they kept questioning and they kept questioning
and he never missed and we were, it was like a four hour mission and I but that they must
have talked to him for three hours asking questions and I was sitting there thinking to
myself, boy am I glad he’s on board because I sure couldn’t answer half of these
questions that they’re asking him. But he had memorized the books, so when we got
back and we landed and taxied in, he turned around and looked at the standboard guy and
he says, ‘Are you through?’ And they says, ‘Yes.’ And he says, ‘Mind if I ask you a
question?’ ‘No, go ahead’ and he asked them some question and they didn’t have the
answer to.

RV: Really?

KK: Yes, right off the bat. I just thought I’d fall out, it was great. But in the
flight crews at that that time, there was very few black reel operators, we had a couple of
officers, pilots that were black and no problem, I mean I never saw any race problems
whatsoever.

RV: How about with the Taiwanese or the Japanese or the Vietnamese?

KK: No, no problems there either. Oh, I will make mention of Padilla though,
we, of course we were stationed in the south, we’re in Louisiana, so we never saw him
off base because he had to go to his part of town and we had to go to our part of town and
you know it was still very segregated, this was during the time Martin Luther King was
marching and everything and I’d get in some pretty heated arguments, I was from
California so I’d get in pretty heated arguments with my wife’s family because some of
them were very…bigoted as can be and they’d sit there and say, ‘Well, it’s all these
people that are coming into the state from out of state that are causing all the problems.’ I
said, ‘Yes, right the ones that live here, they really want to stay in the positions you guys
kept them with,’ and I’d just keep it up all the time. But one of our crews, but the Wing
Commander came down for some reason and they had took an airplane to Hays Aircraft
Corporation in Georgia and Padilla was on the crew, so when they got to Georgia the
colonel says, ‘well, we’re going to go in and get something to eat,’ and Padilla says,
‘Well, I can’t go there.’ He says, ‘What do you mean?’ He said, ‘They won’t serve any
black people in there.’ And he says, ‘What?’ So, since he’s the wing commander and
they’re doing all our aircraft, he says ‘We’ll see about that,’ he says, ‘you’re going come
with me.’ And he took his hat off and gave it to Padilla and he says, ‘Put that on,’ and it
had the eagle on it. So when they walked into the mess hall, of course he’s got the eagles
on his shoulders and the gal says, ‘Sir, I can’t serve him.’ And he turned around and
says, ‘What?’ She says, ‘we’re not allowed to serve blacks in here.’ And he says, ‘get the
manager.’ So the manager came up there and he says, ‘You know we have a twenty
million dollar contract here for repairing aircraft here, you don’t serve this guy I’ll going
to pull that contract.’ ‘Yes, sir’ and they served him. Padilla told me about that later on,
so that was really neat.

RV: How did you feel about that segregation that you guys ran into?

KK: I hated it, I remember one time walking down in Alexandria and listened to a
guy that owned a gas station and he had a guy that was working for him, black, oh I guess
the kid was about nineteen, twenty, something like that and I heard him, just the way he
was talking to him and it was so derogatory and so talking down to him that I, it made me
sick. I’ve never seen that before because where I was from we got along great with black
people and I was in a town that was segregated. I mean San Leandro, California, at that
time was all white and they kept all the blacks out somehow, but I’d go to Y Camp and
stuff and be with all the black kids and never think anything of it. My father and my
mother were very bigoted about it and everybody in my family I guess ahead of me, my
grandmother and everything, they were terrible about it and my wife’s family of course
were and my wife wasn’t much, she wasn’t very segregationist of any sort. Because
when she was young she had a lot of friends that were Indian and black, and of course
she was from a very, very poor family.

RV: Why do you think you were different from the rest of your family?

KK: I don’t know, it’s, maybe because when I was going to Y camp that I had
found so many friends that were black and never gave it a second thought, so I don’t
know, maybe that was it, because I know I’ve always had the feeling that if I don’t like a
person, I don’t like the person, if I like the person I like him and it has nothing to do with,
I don’t care what his family background or anything is, it depends on him.

RV: Well, turning back to Vietnam, tell me what you thought of the leadership
that you had in Vietnam.
KK: Well, I didn’t think much of it, to tell you the truth. Our crew would get assignments, what we did and that’s it, but the upper echelon leadership like our wing commander, never saw the guy, never saw the squadron commander. As far as I know they sat at a desk and just issued orders. I thought the admin was terrible. They didn’t seem to follow anything, for instance we had a set up that for every twenty-five combat missions, they issued an air medal. Well, the first twenty-five missions I flew, they gave me the air medal. Then I got out ahead of the rest of the squadron but I flew two hundred and fifty combat missions; I never got any other air medals for it, nobody sent me anything. When I left my discharge papers didn’t even have the original air medal on it. And then I did have all the other papers, the orders issuing it and everything, but they didn’t put it on my discharge and then on top of that when I was over there, they asked me on the tax situation, you were tax exempt and I told them go ahead and keep holding the money out and I’ll just get it back in a lump sum when I get back to the States. So they did that and then the day I was processing out, they had me down in Taipei that time when they were processing me out and handed me the papers and said, ‘And of course no taxes were taken out,’ and I knew they were. But you know they didn’t keep track, you didn’t get pay stubs like you do in civilian life so you had no way to prove anything, so they screwed me on that. So I didn’t think much of the leadership and I didn’t think anything of the admin people there.

RV: How about the upper military leadership and the overall prosecution of the war?

KK: Well when I was over there and I saw the buildup I thought we were doing well. I didn’t exactly see what they were, what their long term plan was, what their long term plan I thought was going to be to, well I think their idea was to placate all the population and try and keep the north out, but I didn’t give it any thought while I was over there. After I got out of the service I gave it plenty of thought and then I realized, anybody that would send their sons and daughters over there to get killed to hold the line is an idiot and I think any President of the United States, in the future, any time, that ever goes into some other people’s country and doesn’t go in there to win it should just keep his self out of it. You know they could have gone in and taken North Vietnam and they wouldn’t have had any problem with the population, but their idea was different. And I
feel the same way about Korea, I think the more I think about it, the more I think McArthur was right. They should have let McArthur run with it.

RV: When you got back, did you keep up with the war effort and what was happening?

KK: Not much; well, I kept it up but I was getting more disgusted every day because all I was seeing was casualty figures and no gains. I looked at that and says whoever’s driving this thing is nuts.

RV: What did you think of the anti-war movement?

KK: At first I thought they were terrible and I thought they were a bunch of draft dodgers wanting to stay out of it, by 1971 I would have gone to Canada myself if they’d have tried to get me back in. I was all for them, I didn’t go out and march with them or anything, but my mind had turned around quite a bit.

RV: What did you think of the media coverage of the war?

KK: Well, the media coverage was basically we lost this many troops today. There was no coverage of any gains but I don’t think there was many gains that you saw. I think in retrospect that the coverage of the TET Offensive was terrible.

RV: How so?

KK: Well it showed that we were gigantic losers because of it, which we were, because we lost a lot of people but we actually won the battle, hands down. I mean we wiped out all kinds of North Vietnamese on the field but they didn’t get any credit for it. So I have to agree that Cronkite’s probably the one that turned it around.

RV: Really?

KK: Yes.

RV: By his statements?

KK: By his statements, you know, that we shouldn’t be in there and that kind of…and now I agree with him; he was right. If you’re not going in there to win it, don’t go in there.

RV: Right. How about looking back at the media coverage today, do you think the media has a place in covering warfare?

KK: Oh yes, I think they belong there, they should be covering it. Now, as far as the idiot standing in downtown Baghdad and saying what our next plans are and all that
stuff, I think that’s pretty phony, and the reporter standing on the beach in Mogadishu
and filming the Marines coming to shore was kind of stupid, but they do have a place and
I think World War II sure proved it, but if all they’re going to is show casualties, our
casualties, and if they’re going to back up, you know for sure if we go to war with Iraq
right now, that the media is going to listen to the mama standing out there and says, ‘My
baby, my baby, you killed my baby,’ and they’re going to look real bad for the United
States but you know, if you’re going to go to war and Saddam puts all his people right
around the place you’re going to bomb, well you’re going to kill some of them and it’s
just a fact of war. And when you’re really in for a war like we were in World War II,
when we bombed Dresden and wiped the whole town out in fire bombs, nobody was
sitting over there worrying about the Germans.

RV: What do you think is the bravest action that you witnessed while you were in
Vietnam?

KK: The bravest action. Can’t say I witnessed any. None.

RV: Okay. So did you know the exact date that you were leaving?

KK: Yes, yes. I had to be out on September 6.

RV: Did you guys have a countdown to that time?

KK: Oh, I did. Yes, we had, what they call a FIGMO chart and you colored in –
it was the girl, and you colored in all the spaces as you got down to the most important
part of her. Well of course I got mine and I colored in all the spaces for the days that I
wouldn’t be there like the rest of the guys in my squadron because I was going to be out
so much earlier than them, and then of course the day I was supposed to, they were to get
me out, of course they came in there and begged me to stay and I, ‘You people are crazy.’

RV: What were saying to you, why were they…?

KK: Well, they wanted to keep me in the Air Force. They said, ‘You should stay
here at least as long as your squadron,’ and I said, ‘Look, I wasn’t in this squadron when
you sent it over here and I’m not going to be in it now, so just let me out.’ So they had to
commercial me back to McGuire and that’s where I was discharged and then they kept
me two days over my discharge date.

RV: Really?

KK: Yes, some paperwork snafu or something.
RV: Sounds like you had a bad luck with the paperwork.

KK: Yes, but it didn't bother me because my cousin lived up there and he worked for the Chamber of Commerce and was in with all the hotels so they got me a room and my wife came up there and we stayed off the base and everything, so it was nice, I 'd just as soon stay there.

RV: What was your flight back like?

KK: It was eighteen hours, a long one, but of course I was used to flying long flights so it was kind of nice. There was only two GIs on it. What we did is we flew up to Tokyo and then changed onto a Northwest flight that was coming straight back to Seattle, so it was – and it was a night, mostly nighttime, so just a long flight.

RV: Did they tell you to make sure you were in civilian uniforms when you took it?

KK: Oh no, I was in military uniform when I came back.

RV: Okay, did you encounter any problems from that?

KK: Oh, no this was in ’66, people were still behind the war then.

RV: Right, right. Okay, how did you transition to civilian life, was it difficult for you at all?

KK: No, no, I – well, it was in a way. I had an idea I wanted to move to Yuma because we had worked the Yuma proving grounds in the C-130s and I was enthralled with that. That was, to me that was the best job in the Air Force was this testing thing and I wanted to get in on that, so we moved to Yuma. I applied for the Yuma proving ground and nothing was said to me or interested so I went to work for a tire company for fifty dollars a week, just something to kill time. Then finally my dad says, ‘Well, why don’t you come back up and work for me at the plant and go back to school or whatever you want to do.’ And I said, ‘Okay,’ so we went up and they came to pick up our mobile home and everything. The day they were picking it up, I got the papers from the proving ground, but it was too late, I’d already made up my mind. So we moved back to the Bay area and I went to work for my dad for three years, delivering San Francisco and stuff for him and then I got into the driving school business.

RV: Okay. How much did you discuss your Vietnam experiences with other people?
KK: Well, not a lot unless they asked.

RV: Did they ask a lot?

KK: No, I didn’t get that much.

RV: As the war progressed did they ask, when they found out you had been there did they ask anything more?

KK: No, no, nothing.

RV: Okay. What did you think of the U.S. policy to turn the war over to the Vietnamese in ’71, ’72, ’73, the Vietnamization policy, did you think that was viable?

KK: No, I knew they were going to lose it.

RV: Really? Why?

KK: Oh, I didn’t think the Vietnamese could do, they didn’t have the – you know we could hardly hold the North Vietnamese out of there, how were the Vietnamese going to do it with no equipment. We had the backing of all the helicopters and the C-130s all over the place, all kinds of supplies being moved around, the Vietnamese couldn’t do that, even if we gave them a billion dollars a month they wouldn’t have been able to do it on their own.

RV: How did you feel about the United States withdrawal in 1973?

KK: Oh, I thought it was about time.

RV: Really?

KK: Yes, I mean I would have rather they had gone in and won it, but they would have had to have done that years before.

RV: When did you think in your mind that okay, this is a lost cause?

KK: Well, it was probably about ’70, ’71?

RV: Really?

KK: Yes.

RV: What prompted you to think that way and change your mind at that point?

KK: I couldn’t see any progress. You know this country can go into a war in the size of Vietnam should be able it win it in three weeks, I mean, true, you can’t use tank armies, it’s all jungle and that kind of stuff but they sure could have cone in and taken Haiphong and Hanoi and invaded the place and taken it over and I think they would have…I think the Americans would have pacified the populace. Of course after I read
some of the history of it, my firm belief is that we could have been great friends with Ho Chi Minh.

RV: Really?

KK: Oh, I think so. I think you know prior to the war, before we ever got involved with any of that, we should have made good friends with Ho Chi Minh and stayed out of it all together.

RV: We did work with him in World War II against the Japanese.

KK: Yes, we did and then we turned around and worked with the French against them, which was terrible.

RV: How did you feel in 1975 when Saigon fell and then South Vietnam fell?

KK: I just knew it was going to happen; it wasn’t any surprise, so I knew with us out of there, there was no way they could have kept it.

RV: Right. What lessons do you think the United States learned from the war, or if they did learn any?

KK: Well, hopefully, well I know the military learned some great lessons but whether our politicians learned them or not is another thing. It seems like from the Gulf War that our politicians learned a lot. I mean when George Bush went into the Gulf War in the first one, he appeared to do what he should have done in the first place is ordered his generals to go in there and win it. Now of course he stopped them after they were halfway up the road, but at least when they went in there they were in there with the fact that they were going to win it and it wasn’t going to be any dawdling around, the enemy’s there, kill him and that’s the way they have to go into war. You can’t go into war and say, ‘Now go in there and defend this,’ because that’s stupidity but if you’re going to go in there and if somebody goes in and says, ‘Go win that war and whatever it takes,’ and then they go in and do it, then the military’s going to go in and do their job. But when I look back at McNamara and Johnson picking targets in North Vietnam, that is the pinnacle of stupidity. We’re having apolitical war with you can fly over there but you can’t hit anything important, you can just hit what I tell you I’m pointing at, which is absolutely ridiculous.

RV: Well do you think that civilian control of the military is a good thing or a bad thing?
KK: Well it has to be, we have to have civilian control of the military and I think that’s a good thing. I just think that we had very poor leadership in Johnson, so as along as you have civilians in charge you're going to have some that are stupid and some that are smart and I just think Johnson was stupid. I’m not going to win any friends in Texas by saying that.

RV: I wouldn’t be concerned with that. Looking back at your experience, your personal experience in Vietnam, what do you think about it today?

KK: Well, I’m glad I had the experience. It was, you know, I got to see a lot of the world that I never would have seen, I got to some more war stories to tell with the, somebody shooting at me and stuff, ands its an experience that I’m glad that I had, I think it was a lousy situation, but I was glad to have the experience to be in the military and do my job. I’d much rather had the experience with the in-flight refueling because that was my favorite and when I was in the C-130s the only thing I really liked there was the testing that we did at Yuma.

RV: Was there anything that you would want to change about your experience, if you could?

KK: Not really. I couldn’t change the whole outlook of what happened so just my experiences as what I did, no I wouldn’t have changed it.

RV: Okay. What do you think was the most significant thing you learned while you were there?

KK: In Vietnam?

RV: Yes, sir.

KK: Well, hmm. Well I guess the most important thing is stay out of a war unless you’re going to win it. There’s nothing that the lowly GI can do about it, but you know people like Colin Powell and Schwarzkopf that were in Vietnam learned a good lesson from it. They were probably very instrumental in letting Bush know that they weren’t going to send their troops over there just to stand a line. If you want them to go over there, let’s go over there and do it and if you’re not going to do that, let’s not send them over at all. I think he learned an important lesson there, the military did.

RV: What about you personally, did?

KK: Personally, I don’t think I learned much.
RV: How did you think the war has most affected your life, or has it?
KK: I don’t think it affected my life at all.
RV: Really?
KK: Yes.
RV: Why do you think that is?
KK: Well, C-130s was what affected my life the most; it’s what convinced me to get out of the Air Force, because I was going to be in there forever. And if I stayed in in-flight refueling I would have stayed there forever, but the way Tactical Air Command was set up with the troop carrier and you never seeing your family ever, and every thing was temporary duty. In fact they always had that up against you, they said, I had spent a year and a half overseas, in fact when I was over there one of the admin people came up and said, ‘You know, you haven’t spent a combat tour in Vietnam yet.’ I said, ‘What do you think I’ve been doing all this time?’ He says, ‘Yes, but if you haven’t had a PCS for a year in Vietnam; you haven’t had a combat tour,’ so all the time I was doing over there wasn’t counted.
RV: How did you feel about that?
KK: Well, since I was getting out I could have cared less but if I wasn’t getting out I’d have really been upset because that means they could have sent me over there to 123s or something for a year.
RV: Did you try to get into the aerial refueling before you got out?
KK: Well when I got back, you know I was getting out of the service, the day I was getting out the guy says, ‘What would it take to keep you in the service?’ And I says, ‘Well, one thing, I’d have to go back to my original AFSC of in-flight refueling,’ and he says, ‘We can do that.’ Which made me very interested except I knew it was verbal and he wasn't putting anything in writing. And I says, ‘The other thing, you could make me a tech sergeant,’ and he says, ‘Well, I can’t do that,’ and I said, ‘Well, I can’t stay.’ So that was the end of that.
RV: You said you’ve been reading some about Vietnam, are there any books that stand out in your mind that are particularly good that you think about the war?
KK: Well, I haven’t read any full books about it, I purposely didn’t, in fact I didn’t even care to read any books about it.
RV: Why not?

KK: I don’t know, I didn’t, you know I didn’t want to see any of the movies like
Platoon or any of those things, first of all the were all so dramatic and everything and I
don’t want to see a bunch of losers anyway, so I didn’t pay much attention to any of the
novels or anything. So most of what I read was nonfiction, so it was newspaper articles;
I’d watch the History Channel and a few things like that.

RV: Now you said you didn’t want to watch a bunch of losers, what do you mean
by that?

KK: Well, that’s what we were. We were a bunch of, we were over there fighting
a war that we were going to lose, it was designed to lose, whoever designed that just set
us up to lose it.

RV: Do you blame the men on the ground?

KK: No, I blame Johnson and Nixon.

RV: Okay. Have you seen any Vietnam movies?

KK: Yes, I since have seen one, I can’t remember what it was, it was an old one
too. It was some colonel that was out in the jungle that they were trying to stop.

RV: Apocalypse Now.

KK: Yes, Apocalypse Now, I saw that, pretty bad movie I’ll tell you. But there
was a line in there, I’m not going to say what the line was but about morality.

RV: You can if you want to.

KK: Well I hate using the words but he says, he said, ‘You know its amazing that
a guy goes out all day long and bombs women and children out in the field with napalm
and he’s not allowed to put the word ‘fuck’ on the side of his airplane because it’s
immoral.’ And that line really hit home because I’d never thought of it that way and it
was true. If you’re out there bombing a village you didn’t know who was friendly, who
wasn’t. I didn’t know whether my houseboy was friendly or not. That’s pretty difficult
war to fight.

RV: So that rang true to you.

KK: Oh, yes very true.

RV: What do you think about Vietnam today?
KK: Oh, I hope they become a friend, I hope like heck they become a friend. I, my belief now is how stupid we are is we used this banner we’re fighting against communism, if we’re doing all this fighting against communism, what the heck is communism because half our politicians seem to want to turn this country into a communist country. In the meaning that I’m right now dealing with government officials that want to take over some of the jobs I do because there’s money in it and they want the government to run it and I’m sitting there thinking well that’s the same thing I was supposedly over there fighting against it. I don’t think we ever were fighting against Communism; we were just fighting against Russia and China from being superpowers.

RV: Do you think we achieved our goals?

KK: Well, it appears we’ve achieved it with Russia. I really have a lot of faith in Reagan, I think he finally did what had to be done and showed that we had the resolve, none of our presidents seemed to show that the United States had any resolve. We were willing to sit on a par with you people forever, meaning Russia and we’re scared of you and you’ve scared of us and we have this mutual assured destruction but when Reagan went ahead and says, ‘Well, we’re willing to spend the money to increase our offensive power, and our defensive power and everything and Russia couldn’t afford to keep up with us. So I think he won the day on that. I don’t think, if it wasn’t for Reagan, I think Germany would still be divided; we’d still have a wall and everything.

RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in the United States?

KK: I’ve taught a few to drive.

RV: Really?

KK: Yes, and some young ones that don’t know anything about the place.

RV: Do you tell them that you were there at one point or do you just…?

KK: Oh, yes.

RV: You do?

KK: Oh, sure I tell them and mom and dad, tell them I was in Nha Trang. Oh, I’m from Nha Trang, you know, so I get along great with them.

RV: Okay, would you ever want to go back to Vietnam?

KK: Yes, I’d kind of like to go back and see the place.

RV: What would you do?
KK: I don’t know, just tour. Yes, I’d bring my wife.

RV: Has she expressed an interest in seeing where you were?

KK: No, no she doesn’t want to travel over there.

RV: If you had to walk into a classroom and talk to young people today, high school, college age kids about Vietnam, what would you tell them about the war?

KK: Well, I’d tell them it was black mark on the United States, it was a travesty; it was a war that we should never have fought. I think 50,000 plus people lost their lives for nothing. It was the war that if we had to be in there we could have won, but our politicians decided we wouldn’t. It’s nice to have empathy for people that are downcast and they’re being forced by their government to do things that they want to do and all that kind of stuff but if that’s the case then we have to fight almost every country in the world and we’re not going to do that. I feel one of the reasons we should go into Iraq is the way the population is being treated. I think from some of the things I’ve heard, like they’ve executed some of the women right in front of their family and stuff, if somebody got a video camera of that and got it out, of course most of our news media would never show that because it would be too graphic, but if they did stuff like that then maybe they’d have more of these pacifists wanting to do something about it. It’s like we sat back and did nothing about Germany for all the years that they built up until it was, until they were powerful enough to fight the whole world. I think Iraq is a danger because it possess stuff that they could give out to people that could harm us but I don’t know whether its going to be this countries job to go in and win Iraq and go over and then defeat North Korea or whatever, I just don’t know where its going to go from there, but we can’t, if we’re truly into trying to take care of populations that are oppressed then we ought to be in Africa fighting half of those countries too, and we’re not and I don’t think it’s a good idea to do it.

RV: Have you ever been to the Wall in Washington?

KK: No, but I’ve been to the Traveling Wall.

RV: What was your experience like there?

KK: It was quite an experience. In fact I was amazed because when I was in Vietnam I remember the C-141s coming in there with coffins loaded all the way to the ceiling. I knew there was a lot of guys being killed because I hauled a lot of bodies out
myself and I went and looked up name Catahenry, which is a navigator, was a good
friend of mine that was on the airplane that crashed that day at Tuy Hoa, so I went to the
book and I looked up the name and I was dumbfounded when I found it, it was on the
first panel.

RV: Really?

KK: Yes, and I just, wow I couldn’t believe it. All those people on the other
panels came after that. That surprised the heck out of me.

RV: Do you remember your emotions at the traveling wall, was it something that
was difficult for you or was it a curiosity for you?

KK: Well it was, I don’t know, I had really strange feelings about it. I was so
glad that I got to see it and I thought it was a wonderful thing for the people of the United
States to do for the families of Vietnamese, or for the Vietnam veterans, the ones that
were killed and so I think it a great tribute.

RV: Okay. Would you ever want to go to the one in Washington?

KK: Yes, if I ever get to Washington, I would.

RV: Well, sir is there anything else that you’d like to talk about or add to our
conversation yesterday and today?

KK: No, I think that’s, pretty much got everything you can out of me.

RV: Okay, well, I appreciate your time very much sir.

KK: Okay, well thank you very much.