Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins at the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I’m conducting an oral interview with Lieutenant Colonel Kaye Biggar of the United States Air Force. I am in the Special Collections Library interview room on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock and Colonel Biggar is in San Antonio, Texas. Today is the 26th of January 2004. Colonel, can I ask you to begin by telling where and when you were born?


LC: Ok, can you tell me a little bit about your family? For example, what did your father do?

KB: My father did a lot of things. He was a very talented man. Even though he was not technically an engineer, he could fix or make almost anything. He worked for the Air Force for a number of years, initially during World War II as a Link Trainer Specialist, did mostly repair kind of things. Worked for the Union Pacific railroad when we lived in the Dallas, Texas during—not Dallas, Texas; The Dalles, Oregon, during the war, and one of his main jobs was transporting weapons and material from Portland, Oregon, the port, to Umatilla, Washington, which was an Army Ordnance Depot. Rather interesting. We then returned to Spokane and he went into private business with a company that he bought called Perkins Supply Company, which was kind of initially a water pump and plumbing-related business for rural use, and we expanded that into a number of other lines including enough to call it an agribusiness distributorship. And we had an office on one of the main streets in downtown Spokane, and it was relatively successful; I spent a number of years while going to college working there in the
afternoon, and that’s where I gained a great deal of insight into business and management
and things of that nature that boded well for the technical things that I was getting out of
Gonzaga University.

LC: Mm-hmm. Your father’s name was what?

KB: Howard. Howard Ernest Biggar. And my middle name is his name. And I
could tell you a long story about my first name, but I’ll make it short. Kaye is a rather
unusual name for a male. It was not that way back in the ‘20s and ‘30s, and as a matter
of fact, K-A-Y-E, with an E on the end, denoted the male version. The ladies have since
stolen that from us.

LC: There were some famous entertainers, I think, of that era, were there not?

KB: Well, you’re probably thinking of the ones that had the last name, Danny
Kaye, and there was a musician named Sammy Kaye.

LC: Yes. I was thinking of Kay Kizer.

KB: Kay Kizer, yes. Now Kay Kizer did not use the E.

LC: Yes, that’s interesting. Was Kaye a family name?

KB: No, I’ve been told that I was named after an English speedboat racer with
the first name of Kaye. I’m not sure if that’s correct, but that’s a recollection that I have.

LC: Oh, is that your dad’s interest? Did he have an interest in that?

KB: Yes, yes.

LC: Was he a sailor of any kind out there?

KB: He was in the Marine Corps. Served in the Marine Corps in China in the
late ‘20s.

LC: And did he stay in the Marine Corps? Or did he –

KB: No, he got out, oh, I guess ’31, and met my mother and I was born in ’32.

However that works out.

LC: Mm-hmm. Ok, you were telling about your family names and so forth. I
wonder if you could give a little bit more information about your dad’s time in China.

Do you know anything about his service over there?

KB: Not in much detail, he didn’t talk much about that. I know that it’s kind of a
parallel, he was on the Yangtze River on a Navy whatever kind of thing it was, and it was
a Steve McQueen movie once.
LC: Yes.

KB: About I think what he was doing. He never talked much about that.

LC: Yeah, that was quite a famous movie in the late ‘60s.

KB: Yeah. I had always envisioned from the little bit I knew about it that that was, you know it says with the swashbuckling and that kind of stuff, that that was the kind of thing that he was doing.

LC: Did he talk about that very much when you were growing up?

KB: No.

LC: What about your mother? What was her maiden name, and where was she from?

KB: She was from Spokane, Washington, her maiden name was Hanson, Gladys Marie Hanson, and she was probably the most significant influence of my life, not that my father wasn’t in many ways, but I probably spent more time with her, you know breakfast and things like that after he went to work. Late night evenings, we would listen to music, we lived on kind of a plateau about five hundred feet above the city of Spokane, and we lived on the edge, and they had a large, large picture window in the living room, and we’d listen at night to music with the lights off and look over the lights of the city. It was a very impressive view.

LC: How beautiful. It sounds wonderful. Did your mom stay home? Did she ever work outside the home?

KB: She primarily stayed home, except she was the business manager of Perkins Supply for the years that we had that, and even after we closed the downtown store and were no longer physically full-time actively involved in that, we maintained the name and continued to do some business out of the home that she managed. She did also, at a period of time, and that was another time when we were…had much opportunity to visit together. I guess it was my…I guess it was when I was going to college, and she worked for a time as the buyer for the fashion department in the Crescent department store, which at that time was the only major department store in Spokane.

LC: How did she –
KB: And in her later years, til her death, her untimely death, she operated a laundry, you know, kind of a coin operated laundry thing. Or I guess no, they didn’t have coin operators, she actually took the stuff and washed it for people.

LC: She sounds like –

KB: And dry cleaned.

LC: She sounds like quite the businesswoman.

KB: Yes, she was, and I think I learned an awful lot about ethics and business from her.

LC: Had she gone to a school, such that she had an education?

KB: Only high school.

LC: Ok. And she was a Spokane native?

KB: She was a Spokane native. And back to the Crosby – we didn’t talk about Crosby, did we?

LC: No, we didn’t.

KB: Oh, just before.

LC: Sure, go ahead and mention him now.

KB: Well, the younger Crosby brother, Bob Crosby, and she went to high school together at North Central High School in Spokane. And dated a couple times. I could be the millionaire, the son of the Crosby family, but that didn’t work out.

LC: Ok, and did she know Bing Crosby at all?

KB: I don’t think she knew him well.

LC: He was –

KB: She knew of him, but he was a few years senior to Bob and I think maybe had already flunked out of Gonzaga and gone to be a millionaire in California.

LC: Right, gone onto his fascinating future.

KB: That’s a story I tell about, he and I went to school together, he got kicked out, we both played the drums, I graduated, he made a million dollars, and I’m still looking for mine.

LC: But you were better educated.

KB: I think so, yes.

LC: There you go.
KB: I was not a scholar – a star scholar, but I think the combination of business activity and the college, a good tough judge of what college, where they don’t fool around, gave me a pretty good education. But I later expanded to a Ph.D.

LC: And I want to ask you about those things. What high school did you go to, first of all?

KB: I went to a high school in a little town called Mead, Washington. It has since grown into the largest school district in the United States, and one of the most respected. At the time that I went, there were thirty students in my graduating class. And it grew from that. It extended over a very broad geographical area around Spokane, as a result of a number of smaller little town school districts that just, you know, couldn’t quite hack it financially, and so we all affiliated with the Mead school district, which my father was the chairman of…whatever it was.

LC: The school board?

KB: Not the PTA…the board, yeah, the school board.

LC: So he was interested in local politics, then, and in education particularly?

KB: Not really politics; he was interested in the local community.

LC: Oh, Ok.

KB: Service things. He one time considered running for County Commissioner, but he didn’t like the political aspects of it.

LC: Sure, uh-huh. But he sat on the school board?

KB: Yup. As a chair. Sat on the board for a number of years and became the chairman.

LC: That’s really interesting.

KB: And some of his most rapid expansion. Kind of interesting.

LC: Yes, it is, it’s very interesting. Now, in the very small, at that time, high school, did you play sports at all?

KB: Yeah, but not very good. I guess track was my big thing. I wasn’t interested in that much in sports, but I was the student body president and very active in journalism, public speaking, that sort of thing.

LC: What kind of academic student were you?

KB: Oh, probably a B student.
LC: Was that because you didn’t apply yourself so much, or…

KB: It probably was lack of application as much as I should have. And a variety of interests. In addition to being a student, I was a bandleader and very much involved in Grange activities, that’s an organization of farmers. I was a Future Farmer of America kind of guy, and a Four-H guy, so I had a wide variety of interests; it probably kept me from applying as much attention as I maybe should have to strictly academics.

LC: Were you thinking very much that you would go to college?

KB: Oh yes, definitely. I was going to be a lawyer; in fact my first two years in college at Gonzaga were in pre-law. But because of the fact that I was in ROTC and the Vietnam – no not the Vietnam, the Korean War was hard at hand, I saw that I was not going to have the time to finish the law school, which was a six-year course. And also it was conducted at night, and that conflicted with my activities as a bandleader, which was how I made the bread to go to college. So all of those things kind of changed after the first two years in school, and I became a Business Administration major.

LC: Now what was your instrument, or did you have more than one?

KB: I played – I really didn’t have an instrument, I was a drummer. I was the front man and the leader, not the music- musician oriented person.

LC: And were you good at it, though?

KB: Yeah, very good.

LC: Ok.

KB: We as a matter of fact we used to play little rural places, Grange halls and things like that, and a guy that ran a chain of roller rinks decided the roller rink business was kind of going out of favor and he converted one of them into a dance hall and selected my band to open that, along with Louis Armstrong and a western group from wherever it is, Grand Ole Opry. Kind of heavy stuff for a young eighteen-year-old.

LC: I suppose so. That’s pretty remarkable, actually. And you were making a little bit of money with this gig?

KB: Yeah, yeah, as a matter of fact.

LC: And how many pieces did you have in the band?

KB: Oh, we went from…I worked trios and that was appropriate, up to seven and eight pieces.
LC: Now were these mostly...were they guy friends that you knew from school?
KB: Yeah, they started out to be high school mates, but as we went up the chain
in respect in the community and to a degree of professionalism, my original guys kind of
drifted off and I had some of the best players in town.
LC: And you – because you were working at night doing this kind of stuff, the
night school for law was –
KB: Was out.
LC: Was looking less and less like a possibility.
KB: Right.
LC: And did you have a particular affinity for law, you thought that was what
you wanted to do, or was it kind of vague and –
KB: I think it was kind of influenced on me by my peers, as a result of my
prowess in speaking. And I probably wouldn’t have been a very good lawyer because I
probably wouldn’t have done the research to the extent that would have been…
LC: Oh, ok.
KB: I would have been a great courtroom lawyer.
LC: Presentation-wise.
KB: Yeah. Yeah, that’s what they told me.
LC: Well, they were probably right. I mean, often, you get a pretty good read
from other people. They have a good sense of where you are and how you come off.
LC: Now, Gonzaga was chosen why? As your undergraduate education?
KB: Well, because it was a local school, I could stay at home, I had my music
profession and it just fit in, and it was an excellent law school.
LC: Yes, and still is a very highly respected law school.
KB: Yeah, yeah. And a good basketball team!
LC: Yes sir. And both of those two programs – athletics and law school – bring
that institution national recognition. A higher profile than many other institutions its size.
KB: Certainly, certainly.
LC: Now, I should actually ask you what year you graduated high school.
LC: Ok. And were you at that point concerned that you might be drafted into the military because of the escalation in Korea?

KB: Well, no, because I had pre-registered for college, I wasn’t concerned about drafted. I knew that I had an ROTC commitment and was going to wind up in Korea unless it stopped, so yeah. All of those things were pretty evident, pretty well laid out and pre-planned.

LC: Why did you choose the ROTC path? What was influencing you there, do you remember?

KB: Well, that was the way you got the deferment order, to stay in complete four years of school.

LC: Did you have an interest, though, in becoming an officer? Did you –

KB: Oh, I think so, yeah. I can remember when I was a kid in The Dalles, Oregon, during the war. I had a little group of neighborhood friends and we would dig trenches and that sort of thing, and I self-appointed myself as a major in the Marine Corps. So yeah, I think I had the interest.

LC: Were there other family influences aside from your father’s military service that gave you some kind of military heritage in your background?

KB: No, I don’t believe so, other than the fact that my father’s brother was also in the Marine Corps, but I was never very close to him, nor did he influence me. I only knew that as background.

LC: When were you a kid, though, World War II was very much probably something that you were trying to pay attention to and knew about.

KB: Oh, yeah, being about a hundred miles from the Pacific coast on the Columbia River, we kids had our foxholes and we were ready for them to hit us.

LC: In case they hit the beaches, huh?

KB: Yeah, then we’d beat them up with our wooden guns.

LC: Can you tell me about how the ROTC program was structured at Gonzaga?

KB: Yeah, it was a four year thing, two days a week, classes, in addition to regular college classes, and every Thursday was Drill Day, where we wore a uniform and in addition to having an hour or so class, we would drill on the parade ground at Gonzaga.
LC: What elements of it, if any, really appealed to you? Did you have fun doing it?

KB: I wouldn’t say it was fun. It was – I did pretty well in the classes and I was not probably the best marcher, I wasn’t on the drill team. But I didn’t not like it. But it wasn’t the most exciting thing in my life.

LC: Right. And your life was pretty full, it sounds like.

KB: That’s right.

LC: After your second year of college, you changed your major it sounds like. To Business Administration.

KB: Yes.

LC: And was that influenced by some of what you had learned from both your parents and their independent business efforts that they had?

KC: Yeah, I think so, and I was not – even though my father was very, very technically inclined, I was not interested in being an engineer, which was one of the other major courses at that time.

LC: Now did you have the mathematics to cut it?

KB: No, I didn’t. I did not do well in math and science. And that’s why I spend so much of my time today working with the Aerospace Education Foundation on trying to get kids interested in math and science. We’ll talk more about that at a later point.

LC: Sure. Sure, I’ll just make a note. The Business Administration curriculum that you had at Gonzaga…what parts of it were most interesting to you?

KB: I didn’t like…

LC: Least interesting?

KB: I didn’t like bookkeeping. As a matter of fact, just between you and…well, no, you’re going to publish this, aren’t you?

LC: Well, no, it will be available to researchers, see.

KB: Well, it’s kind of half a joke, but it’s halfway true.

LC: Ok.

KB: I had my bookkeeper do most of my bookkeeping.

LC: Yeah, it just didn’t appeal to you.

KB: No.
LC: Were there parts of it that you thought were especially useful, though?
KB: Oh yeah, yeah, I think so. Personnel management things.
LC: Ok.
KB: And I think that’s why…I’d been in the personnel business, well, when I was on active duty, in the personnel business related things, which we’ll talk about more, I’m sure.
LC: Yes, very much so.
KB: But I think that background helped me to really enjoy the personnel, with dealing with people. The other thing that I was interested in was radio and television. I did some radio programs. Television was in its infancy at that time.
LC: Yes sir.
KB: And I did a couple of things on television, but I wasn’t extremely photogenic, so I never pursued that.
LC: Now what kinds of things did you do with TV?
KB: TV, just a couple of drama things.
LC: Where those local things that you did?
KB: Yeah, they were local things. KXLY was the studio; I think they’ve changed their call letters now. And did some farm programs on another radio station.
LC: Did you think that might be something you’d like to pursue as a career? Broadcasting, or…?
KB: I very possibly might have, had it not been for the war and for ROTC and coming in the Air Force. And that’s another interesting story we’ll have to talk about.
LC: Right, I wanted to ask you, before we get to the ROTC and your graduation, I’d like to know a little bit about your thinking about the Korean conflict. What – how much attention were you able to pay? I get that you’re extremely busy as an undergraduate. Could you pay any attention to the developments in Korea and U.S. policy over there?
KB: Well, I think the extent of what it was was reading the headlines in the daily newspaper. I was not deeply into it, I was not philosophically involved or concerned. It was war, it was the United States doing what our leadership thought we should do and that’s the way we thought in those days.
LC: Right. Now your ROTC program continued throughout your undergraduate years, is that right?

KB: Yes. And it was Army ROTC.

LC: Yes sir. And how did it come to be then that you were commissioned in the Air Force?

KB: Well, a group of us heard about a program that the Air Force had to take Army ROTC cadets, and if they qualified for flying training, to allow them to be commissioned in the Air Force. Out of the eight or ten of us that pursued that, I was the only one that did it.

LC: Now, why was that? What happened to the other guys?

KB: They just stayed in the Army.

LC: Were there some tests that maybe they didn’t pass?

KB: Some of them – some of them had eye problems, that sort of thing.

LC: Sure, uh-huh.

KB: And then lack of motivation from the initial trip that we took to Parks Air Force base for our Air Force orientation.

LC: Ok, do you remember that orientation course?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. How long did it last?

KB: Three days.

LC: Ok. What did you do during those three days? What were the main points?

KB: Oh, primarily went to different lectures and did some physical things, I think we all took physicals there.

LC: And you did rather well on the training element of it?

KB: Well, it wasn’t doing well, it was just listening and absorbing.

LC: Oh, ok.

KB: There was no testing.

LC: Ok. And the physicals, though, you passed those fine?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok. And at what point did you actually transition from the Army officer’s…

KB: Oh, it was toward the end of my senior year.
LC: Ok.

KB: 1955. I think I probably – it began in late ’54, and I was commissioned I believe on the 21st of January ’55, by a brigadier general from what was then the other base in Spokane. Geiger Air Force Base. It was an air…fighter. Fighter base. It’s now the municipal airport.

LC: Do you…did you have to go out there for a ceremony of some kind?

KB: No, the general came to the school. General Sam Agee, A-G-E-E.

LC: He came to the school?

KB: Came to the school, you bet. Just for me, how about that.

LC: And you were the only one, right?

KB: I was the only one. Even got my picture in the paper.

LC: Super.

KB: Yeah.

LC: What was that experience like, to have a general come and…I mean, just for you?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Was it like – was it amazing?

KB: Well, somebody else arranged it.

LC: Well, sure, but I mean. His trip was specifically because of your transition into the Air Force.

KB: Yeah, he gave me the Oath of Office.

LC: What did that feel like? Did it make you like a big man on campus kind of thing?

KB: Well, it was in my last month or so, and no, I don’t think it made me feel like a big man on campus or, you know.

LC: It’s pretty unique, there.

KB: My grandmother saved the picture.

LC: I’ll bet she did.

KB: Yeah.

LC: Were your parents proud of you at this point?
KB: Yeah, my parents let me live a very independent life. I’m sure they were very proud, they were never involved because I was independent, and I left in the morning to go to school and went to work in the afternoon in my entertainment business, which we haven’t talked about either, and came home late at night.

LC: And you’re pretty much out there making your own decisions and flying large there.

KB: Yeah, I think so. But with, you know, good backup and guidance and excellent support in anything I wanted to do.

LC: That’s super. Tell me a little bit about your entertainment business. Now you’ve told us that you actually were performing.

KB: Yes. I was performing then I was also managing bands and individual entertainers for a company called the Spotlight Talent Agency.

LC: Ok.

KB: Where I went every afternoon after school, 2:00 or whatever and worked in the office with entertainers and that, and then also went out and helped produce variety shows at various venues.

LC: So were you getting bookings for various entertainers in the area?

KB: Yes, yes.

LC: And was Spotlight based in Spokane, or was it –

KB: Yes, yes it was. It was locally owned.

LC: And did it have affiliations with the broader entertainment industry on the west coast?

KB: Yes, yes with the American Federation of Musicians, I was also a licensed talent agent from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, and then…yeah, we had all the affiliations, but we were privately owned. We worked with some of the majors like Music Corporation of America, and that sort of thing.

LC: Yes. And how long…are you still available, sir?

KB: Yes, yes. I’m sorry.

LC: Ok. No, that’s fine. How long did you keep your hand in the entertainment business?
KB: Oh, I guess throughout college and I’d later open my own company that I ran for about two years called OK Attractions, doing the same thing.

LC: Whereabouts was that? Still –

KB: Spokane, Washington.

LC: Ok. And what years did you do that?

KB: Probably ’52 to ’54.

LC: Ok.

KB: I think I did it after I went off to summer ROTC training camp, and when I came back from that, because I’d had a break from the thing and still on good relations and we worked very closely together, my former boss John Greenleaf and I, but I just decided I’d take a crack at it myself, and make a little more money.

LC: Yeah, sure, and it sounds like an extremely interesting thing.

KB: It was very exciting.

LC: Particularly since just at that point, television is just coming on board and it’s clear that there’s this whole new industry, really, that’s developing, and local broadcasting stations were probably hungry for content, that would be my guess.

KB: I never really got involved in that. What I was involved in was the other end of it, the dying end of it. We used to book the big bands throughout the Washington-Idaho-Oregon-Montana and even into Canada. But as you know, they demised in…well, yeah. Right about then. That was about the end of the big band era.

LC: Would you have worked with any names that listeners might recognize? Even regional listeners who might know something about that era and entertainers?

KB: I guess I had a hand in booking most of the majors. The – both of the Dorsey Brothers. Not Glenn Miller…Glenn Miller led by Tex Beneke.

LC: Yes.

KB: Sammy Kaye, yeah, most of them that came into the area. Spokane was unique because we were halfway between Seattle, which was the largest city in Spokane and was very active on a circuit. Then the next jump was Minneapolis, Minnesota. And we would get them on Sunday nights. And the biggest source was a place called Natatorium Park, which was a…what was it, they had the Ferris Wheels and all kinds of stuff. And we would book the bands there and on the military bases, and I had excellent
connections with the military bases. That was part of the reason I opened my own
company, was because of my contacts with them. And most of the business the company
did was with Officers and NCO Clubs and service clubs at bases throughout that four
state area.

LC: And there were a good number of bases in that area?
KB: Oh, yeah. I think probably sixteen.
LC: And very busy, too.
KB: Yeah, at that time.
LC: With buildup in Korea and so on.
KB: Yeah. You bet.
LC: That really sounds like quite an amazing thing. I sort of wonder that you
decided to shift to a military career.
KB: Well, I had to.
LC: Ok. Can you tell us why?
KB: Because of the war. And a commitment to ROTC. And a commitment to
two years active duty.
LC: Ok. So once you had graduated and completed your ROTC and you were
commissioned in the Air Force, you had an obligation for two years?
KB: Correct.
LC: Of full time service?
KB: Yes.
LC: And so you reported, I would guess to…
KB: Lackland. Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.
LC: And that would be for basic training, was it?
KB: Well, it was officer orientation.
LC: Can you tell us what the length of that course was?
KB: Oh, I think the basic course itself was only about three months.
LC: Ok.
KB: I did not – I came in to fly. I did not fly.
LC: Why not? What happened?
KB: I lost my enthusiasm for it before I even got into it.
LC: Is that right?

KB: And had an opportunity to go into the personnel field, and because my motivation to fly was not a lifelong thing. I had a Piper Cub when I was twelve years old or whatever. I took the opportunity to get into the personnel business because I thought I could really contribute more.

LC: And that decision to just not follow the flying route was made when? When did you actually come to that decision?

KB: Oh, I think in ’55, just a few months after I was – after I became – after I came on active duty. I then went to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois for personnel school.

LC: Yeah. Can you…tell me about the personnel training. How long did that last?

KB: Six weeks.

LC: Ok. And what was the content? Can you describe what it was the curriculum had to offer?

KB: Ooh, wow. This is years ago… Ancient history, huh?

LC: I think all the basic elements of military personnel. I think the selection for people to go into that were the ones that had not necessarily a minor or a degree in personnel management, but had sufficient understanding of the basics. And so we were taught the military personnel system, and how to administer it, and you know, a broad overall agenda, that was it.

LC: Now you were…

KB: How to do morning reports, how to do officer records, how to do assignments, classification of people, things like that.

LC: All of the administrative back end of getting people into the field and operating –

KB: And managing them in the field, which is what I then next did whenever we’re going to get into that, if we’re going to get into those kinds of things.

LC: Oh sure, I want to hear – I want to hear everything you have to tell us. I mean, this is actually very interesting. The selection of personnel training, was that
something that someone suggested to you, or did you kind of pick that out as something you could do that you thought might be important?

KB: Yeah, I don’t remember that exact process, but there were not – they made me a transportation officer, and you know, I didn’t think I wanted to do much with driving trucks around.

LC: Ok, that didn’t appeal, really.

KB: No. So when the opportunity came up to go off to personnel school, I said, ‘That’s better than driving trucks.’

LC: Ok.

KB: I’m joking, transportation officers do far more than drive trucks.

LC: I know. And we’ll probably have a chance to talk about your interface with the different areas of administration and logistics later on in your career.

LC: At this point, had you weapons qualified? Can you tell us where you were in terms of –?

KB: Yeah, I think we weapons qualified during the three year – three-month orientation at Lackland. M-1 was the rifle at the time, and the .45 was the pistol. And the .45 pistol carried me through my career.

LC: Was that your favorite weapon, as time went on?

KB: I guess so.

LC: If you had one.

KB: Because it was the one.

LC: Ok.

KB: In fact, that’s why I can’t hear too good out of my right ear, from shooting that rascal.

LC: Yeah, they lay out a wallop, don’t they?

KB: Then, when we talk more, I’ll talk about virtually every other weapon that I qualified in.

LC: Ok, good. The personnel course that lasted six weeks up at Scott. Can you tell us of where you were billeted and how an average day was?
KB: Yeah, it was really neat because billeting was short, but they had an extensive civilian family complex, and so three of us were given a three-bedroom apartment.

LC: Not bad.

KB: Yeah, no it was neat. It was really neat. We could cook and everything.

LC: Now you were –

KB: I thought it was a pretty good deal, I thought, ‘Boy, the Air Force is alright.’

LC: Yeah. Your rank at this time would still have been…

KB: Second lieutenant.

LC: Second lieutenant. Ok. At what point did you make first lieutenant?

KB: Eighteen months to make first lieutenant, I guess I made first lieutenant in July or something of ‘56.

LC: Ok. So that’s jumping ahead just a bit. After you completed the personnel training course at Scott, what happened? Where’d you go?

KB: I was sent to Turner Air Force Base, Albany, Georgia. Probably the best experience – one of the best experiences, particularly for a young lieutenant that I’ve ever had.

LC: Why is that?

KB: I was selected to deploy overseas initially to Hahn Air Base, Germany, with a fighter squadron. And I was a squadron adjutant. Administrative guy. If it didn’t fly, I took care of it.

LC: And –

KB: Very challenging job for which I was personally selected by the wing commander at the time.

LC: Ok. How long were you actually at Turner before –

KB: Oh, I spent three years at Turner, I guess, in different jobs which we can talk about when you’re ready to talk about it.

LC: Sure. How about now?

KB: How about now? Started off with the dullest job in the world, the chief of the morning report and pay section. But learned an awful lot in that and moved over and got into the officer management area, which was very, very interesting.
LC: Ok. The morning report, for somebody that wasn’t familiar with that, could you just outline what that is?

KB: Yeah, that was a thing that they tallied up everybody by head count in the squadrons and we put all that together. One day I signed my name, they told me thirteen thousand times. I think they meant thirteen hundred.

LC: That’s a lot of paper.

KB: Yeah. That I never read. Impossible to have read it. I had to rely on my people to do things right. And I would do you know, spot checks, that sort of thing. I never would pretend to say I read through every one of those pieces of paper.

LC: And after working in that section, you were also responsible for pay at that time too?

KB: Yes, yeah. That was a lot of fun, particularly when we had large temporary duty things, and a hundred guys would come back and all want their per diem now.

LC: Sure.

KB: Well it didn’t happen quite ‘now’, but we would turn it fast and most of them would have it in two days.

LC: And you learned a lot, though, from that particular assignment.

KB: Yeah. It was kind of a dull routine thing, but I learned a lot from it.

LC: And after that you went to what assignment?

KB: Management – managing the officers’ section.

LC: Ok. And describe your general duties there.

KB: Ooh, lots of counseling, reviewing officer effectiveness reports and sending them back to the dismay of the poor sergeant in the squadron who would have to type it over again because I found a misspelling or a grammatical error or something. Very time consuming, but interesting work.

LC: So you were doing some quality control on the paper end of this as well as offering…

KB: Counseling advice, handling assignments, processing people. I processed the people for the first U2 squadron that the CIA had that was located in El Paso, Texas. Kind of an interesting little anecdote.

LC: That’s very interesting. Is there more –
KB: Francis Gary Powers.

LC: Is there more –

KB: Remember that name?

LC: Yes I do, he was shot down later, wasn’t he, sir?

KB: Yes. I put him through – into training for that.

LC: You did. How many people were in that group that were trained for the earliest –

KB: Well, from our base, and it was from another wing, but I was selected by a wing commander to go off to 8th Air Force Headquarters to learn the mechanics of what needed to be done, and granted a top secret security clearance in order to handle that program.

LC: Sure.

KB: And I would say from Turner Air Force Base, we put about thirty people into it.

LC: How were they selected? What special criteria did they have, do you know?

KB: Well, first they had to pass the top-secret test. They had to be excellently rated in their flying abilities.

LC: Ok.

KB: Physical characteristics, we couldn’t take big tall guys and we couldn’t take little bitty guys, because the pressure suits were standardized for basically a five-ten to six foot little bit plus person.

LC: Really, that’s interesting.

KB: That was a complex process and sending them around different places in the country to be fitted for the suit.

LC: Yeah. If that was a governing feature that had to be met.

KB: Yeah, yeah it was one. There were limitations like that. Somebody would call that prejudicial today, but that’s the way of the world.

LC: Yeah, sometimes – sometimes that stuff happens, right? What else do you remember about putting together those early units for training for the U2? Did you have to know the characteristics –?
KB: I – no, I had nothing to do with it after we got them through the initial indoctrination, the suit experience, that sort of thing. I was not involved in the actual training of them.

LC: But – you had to handle the paperwork for getting them assigned to it?

KB: Yeah.

LC: And they were all being assigned…I’m sorry, what base for the training?

For U2 training?

KB: They went to…tip of my…Del Rio, Texas. [Actually, El Paso, Texas]

LC: Ok.

KB: And I can’t think of the name of the base right at the moment.

LC: That’s ok.

KB: Del Rio [El Paso], Texas because it’s out in the middle of nowhere.

LC: Nowhere, yes, yes sir. Yes sir, it is.

KB: It’s where the world’s most powerful radio station was.

LC: Is that right?

KB: Yup. And for a dollar you could get an autographed picture of Jesus Christ.

LC: Oh really? You could pick up that much, huh?

KB: If you mailed it in, you’d get it back. Thought I’d give you some idea of the remoteness. And that was from the Mexican side of the border, incidentally.

LC: Oh, ok. Ok. I’m with you. The U2 flight training is interesting. Were there other special units that you recall having worked on the paperwork for the men?

KB: No, that was the only major program that comes to my mind.

LC: Ok.

KB: Shortly after that, I was selected for that deployment that I talked about, overseas –

LC: Overseas, uh-huh.

KB: The fighter squadron F-100s, one of the first F-100 units in the Air Force.

LC: I just wondered if you knew anything for example about down at Lackland, they were developing just briefly there in the mid-‘50s, the nuclear airplane. I wondered if you knew anything about that program.

KB: No, I didn’t.
LC: I think they called it the ANP. Ok.
KB: No, I hadn’t heard of that.
LC: Yeah, that’s something I’m interested in, I was just wondering if you had come across that.
KB: Yeah. Lackland? I wouldn’t think it was at Lackland. Lackland didn’t even have a runway until Lackland was combined a year ago with Kelly Air Force Base and Lackland is now…owns the runway.
LC: I think maybe they were doing the design work down there or something like that.
KB: Yeah, it could have been.
LC: So you were selected especially for this tasking overseas to – was it Hahn Air Base?
KB: Initially to Hahn, we stayed there fifteen days and then went to Aviano Air Base in Italy, northern Italy, and this was all during the Lebanese crisis, we were there, we had two aircraft on standby, nuclear armed twenty-four hours a day with the remainder of the twenty-four airplanes in the squadron to be off in two hours. Testy days.
LC: Yes, exactly. And were you actually at Aviano during this period?
KB: Yes. Yes.
LC: Ok. Can you tell us a little bit about what that alert was like? Did you have to change personnel rotas and so forth in order to accommodate that high state of alert?
KB: Well, two out of twenty-four, you know it was however the mathematics works out for that.
LC: You had those - those guys were ready, though.
KB: Yeah, the other guys were flying regularly, daily, on training missions.
LC: But you had two birds loaded full time?
KB: Right, right.
LC: About how long did that last? That state of readiness?
KB: We were there for two weeks shy of six months. It was a six month rotation.
We spent two at Hahn – two weeks at Hahn and then you do the numbers, the majority of the time was at Aviano.
LC: Your posting at Aviano, did it allow you to get off base much?
KB: Oh, yeah. Yeah.
LC: Ok.
KB: Except it was at times a little scary because the communists were very active in northern Italy.
LC: Yes sir. Did you ever encounter or see any of that kind of activity?
KB: I did not personally, but I had one buddy of mine driving a Jeep down the road, they put a piece of barbed wire across the road and the windshield was knocked off. He was not injured. But those things were out there.
LC: And were particular targets being made of U.S. military personnel, do you know?
KB: Not really, no. We didn’t have the kind of thing that occurred in later years. No attempts to attack the base. The base was two different things. The main support base was up on a hill, and the runway was down in a valley. And while we had security at the major entry points, the airfield was not totally secure.
LC: Ok. But there were no incidents?
KB: But we had guards on all the planes.
LC: Sure, yeah. Oh yeah.
KB: And the major installations. For example, my office was in a hangar.
LC: And you were doing what kind of work there, sir? Were you –
KB: That was strictly personnel work. Well, it was more than personnel work. As I say, if it didn’t pertain to flying, it was my responsibility to see that it was done, including supervising the augmentees to the mess hall, supervising the security police…as a matter of fact, I don’t think the base security police provided any security police protection for us, it was our own security policemen that we augmented and took with us.
LC: Do you mean that were attached to the squadron, or…
KB: Yes, yes. That were members of the squadron. That was probably the first big test that I did when I went in, and maybe one of the reasons that I was selected, because I had a good overall knowledge of people on the base to select and interview to
augment to take with us. The cooks, the firefighters, the security forces, some transportation guys, augmented maintenance personnel, that sort of thing.

LC: And you kind of had to put together the team based on your knowledge of kind of where everybody’s strengths lie?

KB: Yes, exactly.

LC: What – just for the record, which squadron were you with?

KB: With the 308th Tactical Fighter Squadron.

LC: Ok.

KB: Of the 31st Fighter Wing.

LC: Ok.

KB: Which now is the parent organization at Aviano. How about that for a coincidence?

LC: Well, there seems to be some symmetry there, anyway. Did you enjoy your time at Aviano?

KB: Yeah. It was neat.

LC: And you actually got to –

KB: I enjoyed the work and also the little time that we had off. When in the fall of ’58 when we were there, we rented a hotel on the Adriatic Post as our R&R site, set for our people to go to. And in the winter we rented a villa for them to go up to go skiing. So it was, you know, hard work, but when the time was off, it was really a unique area.

LC: Totally. Being from the Northwest, were you a skier at all?

KB: No, I was not.

LC: Oh, ok.

KB: I used to ski in the bar.

LC: Yeah, that’s how I do it too.

KB: Après-ski, they call it, I think.

LC: That’s how I do it too. Did the guys who were in the squadron kind of look to you both formally and informally for advice? Do you think people kind of came to you?

KB: Yes. Yes. That was my job, but it went far beyond that in terms of things non-military. For example, I was before the deployment the treasurer of the credit union
at Turner Air Force Base, a volunteer, you know, off-duty job. And so I continued that
relationship as a kind of an expeditor or coordinator, because everybody had to buy a
Porsche.

LC: Right.

KB: And they needed money.

LC: Yes sir, and you –

KB: And so I processed their paperwork.

LC: You helped them on their way to their Porsche.

KB: Right. I only had a Volkswagen.

LC: Were you involved at all in making certain that your element of the Air
Force was observing the desegregation rules?

KB: That was not a big issue at that time. But later, I was very involved in that.

So we can talk about that.

LC: Yes, I’d very much like to. Were you also advising men on how to proceed
for promotion and getting career paths kind of straightened out for people?

KB: Yeah, yeah, I was, and one of my big things that not only I sold but I really
pushed it hard was to tell those dumb fighter pilots that flying an airplane was great and
they had to do that, but they needed to have an additional duty because it was the
additional duty that was going to set them aside from the other guy to have experience
and background to become a total concept kind of guy that would be better qualified for
promotion than just the guy that flew the airplane.

LC: Yeah, advising them not to be unidimensional even if it was you know, the
hot thing to do.

KB: Yeah, I spent a lot of time at that.

LC: And was that a hard sell?

KB: Yeah, to some guys it was.

LC: What kinds of things –

KB: It depended on what additional duty I was offering them.

LC: Well that’s just what I was going to ask you.

KB: Mortuary officer didn’t go too big, so I had to take that myself.

LC: You were the mortuary officer as well?
KB: Oh yeah.

LC: Was that just at Aviano, or elsewhere too, that you ended up doing that.

KB: Oh, I guess technically a number of other places I was a mortuary officer. I did not do any embalming, however.

LC: Ok. Well actually while we’re talking about it, what is a mortuary officer responsible for?

KB: Somebody dies, you do all the paperwork, notify the next-of-kin, gather up all their personal articles, mail them to the next-of-kin, look after financial affairs and also make sure the guy in the mortuary office did his job right.

LC: Such that the body…

KB: The embalmer.

LC: The body gets handled the way it’s supposed to?

KB: Yeah, you know, I didn’t stand there and supervise, I knew nothing about it. To make sure it got on the airplane and got to where it was supposed to go.

LC: So you were sort of –

KB: Fortunately, I only had one guy that bought the farm at Aviano.

LC: Really?

KB: Yeah. He was one of my closest friends.

LC: What happened? Was it an accident?

KB: Well…I think we determined it to be mechanical error.

LC: Ok. Was he a flier then?

KB: Yeah. Yeah. F-100 pilot.

LC: The F-100s were pretty much new out of the chute at this point, is that right?

KB: Would you say that again?

LC: Sure. The F-100 was basically a pretty new piece of equipment.

KB: It was. It was the hottest thing in the Air Force inventory at that time.

LC: Yes sir. How many of them were stationed there at Aviano?

KB: Twenty-four.

LC: And these were the birds that were loaded with nuclear capable…

KB: Yeah, we can say that now. I can’t get into much detail.
LC: No, that’s fine. The pilots who were flying F-100s. What kind of background had they had to have to transition to this –

KB: Ok, we had three or four captains, one of them who was the operations officer, was a Korean veteran and he was an ace.

LC: Is that right? Do you remember his name?

KB: James Kasler.

LC: Ok. Do you know how to spell his last name?

KB: K-A-S-L-E-R

LC: Ok, and he was –

KB: And he is now deceased.

LC: Ok. He was an ace from –

KB: He was an ace. Five.

LC: Wow. That’s impressive. That’s really something.

KB: Yeah, we had top-notch guys.

LC: It sounds like.

KB: Another guy, Leo Thorsness, let me spell that for you, T-H-O-R-S-N-E-S-S, was shot down in Vietnam and was awarded the Medal of Honor. Very close friend of mine.

LC: Ok. And you met him at Aviano? Or did you already know him?

KB: No, I knew him at Turner, we went to Aviano together.

LC: Oh, ok. What year was he shot down, do you know?

KB: I don’t know.

LC: But he was a Medal of Honor winner?

KB: Yes.

LC: Wow.

KB: One of few. Air Force.

LC: Can you describe, give us a general kind of thumbnail description of this man?

KB: He was a quiet kind of guy. He didn’t really stand out, he did his job, I don’t think he picked up on one of my additional duty recommendations or he may have,
I don’t remember the details. But he turned out to be a hero. He also ran for Senator from Minnesota, I think. Unsuccessfully.

LC: Did he really?
KB: Yeah.

LC: Do you know what year that was?
KB: Oh, boy. It’s somewhere in the…had to be in the ‘70s. Mid ‘70s.
LC: Wow, that’s something else.
KB: Yeah, he was a great guy. One you would not have thought to have pursued that, but after you sit in prison for six years and think, I guess you think being involved in the country is an important thing to do.

LC: Sure. Not unlike –
KB: I’ve never talked with him about it.

LC: Not unlike John McCain, it sounds like.
KB: Yeah. Yeah.
LC: And is he still alive, sir, do you know?
KB: Yes. Yeah, as a matter of fact they did an interesting article on him out in…Phoenix, I think he lives in Phoenix. And he’s in the book that’s out now, the recently published book on Medal of Honor winners, which you ought to get in the library.

LC: Yes sir, I’ll make sure that we have it. He spent six years in –
KB: I believe six years, yeah.

LC: Have you spoken to him subsequent to his release?
KB: I have not.

LC: Ok. He sounds like –
KB: I have to a number of others, though, which we’ll talk about later.

LC: Sure. Were there other guys there at Aviano that you remember their backgrounds and what happened to them?

KB: I believe he was the only one…no, Kasler was shot down too. The one we talked about before. The ace.

LC: In Vietnam.
KB: I think he was only in for a couple, three years. I don’t recall all the details on that.

LC: Ok, well we can –

KB: It didn’t have as a profile as Thorsness did nationally.

LC: Very interesting to follow that up, though. It sounds like an excellent crew of men that you were working with there at Aviano.

KB: They were. They were hand-picked for that mission.

LC: Yeah. How long did you stay at Aviano? You said it was a little more than six months?

KB: Five and a half months.

LC: Ok. And you then left in 195…9?

KB: Yeah.

LC: And where did you go?

KB: Went back to Turner Air Force Base, the wing had disbanded and I went to the 431st Air Refueling Squadron, as the adjutant executive officer.

LC: Ok. Can you describe your duties? Were they very similar to what you had been doing?

KB: Very much the same, perhaps a little bit expanded because we didn’t have a parent unit on base, we were a tenant unit and we had to do more things. One thing particularly that I recall is I got authority from the base publications people to be able to publish our own orders because many of the missions that the B-29 air refueling aircraft went on went on what we call VOCO, the Verbal Order of the Commanding Officer. We would get a request for an airplane that needed gas some place, and he’d say, ‘Go.’ And then we’d have to back all that stuff up with official orders so that when the crew got back they could get their per diem.

LC: Right, so you had to handle…

KB: That was one of the major – I had one man that did nothing but that.

LC: Wow. Wow.

KB: You know, seven guys get on an airplane, and you don’t know where they were before they got on the airplane or if they’re on the airplane, and you’ve got to figure
all that stuff out and process the paperwork to get finance to pay it. That was a one-man job.

LC: Yeah. That sounds like a lot of – a lot of balls in the air to document all of that.

KB: Yeah. That’s just one example.

LC: Ok. Now you were executive officer, correct?

KB: Yes.

LC: Did you have –

KB: Administrative executive officer. Nothing to do with the flying part.

LC: Right. And so you were…sort of the buck stops here man for all of the administrative work?

KB: Yeah, in effect, unless it was related to flying when the commander was gone, he was gone a lot because he liked to fly and it was important that he do that, I was in effect the guy that made all of the administrative decisions.

LC: Ok, and who was the commander there?

KB: Benjamin F. Chapman.

LC: Ok. He was, as you say, he was a flier. What aircraft were assigned to the 431st?

KB: KB-50s.

LC: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

KB: It was an evolution of the B-29 of World War II. In fact, I think a minute ago I mentioned B-59…B-29, because that was the first aircraft they had, then they got the modified one that was called the B-50.

LC: And the KB-50 –

KB: KB, KB-50. K stands for air refueling.

LC: Oh, it does? I didn’t know that. So the KB-50s in the squadron…were they difficult on maintenance and that –

KB: Yeah, they were.

LC: Ok, can you tell a little bit about that, if you know much about them?

KB: No, because I technically don’t know. I just know that maintenance was a major effort.
LC: And did you have to do all the paperwork to back that up as well because you had –

KB: No, no, I did not have anything to do with the maintenance.

LC: Ok. What – who would take are of that kind of thing?

KB: Oh, we had a major who was a maintenance officer. And he had a staff of fifteen, twenty administrative people that would do that. I think the maintenance compliment was about three hundred and fifty people.

LC: Wow.

KB: For twenty-four airplanes.

LC: That’s pretty heavy.

KB: With four engines on each airplane.

LC: Yeah, that’s pretty heavy.

KB: Right.

LC: And this was all, again, just to confirm, still at Turner?

KB: Turner Air Force Base. Before SAC gave it away and Strategic Air Command came in.

LC: Ok.

KB: With B-52s.

LC: And what year was that that it went over to SAC?

KB: I think ’60.

LC: Ok. But you had, I gather, left by then?

KB: Yes. I stayed there about five months and then was assigned to Bitburg Air Base in Germany.

LC: And would this have been 1959?


LC: Ok.

KB: Summer, I think July.

LC: Ok. Your assignment over there – now this was the second time you had been to Germany, your other posting just for a couple weeks.

KB: Yeah, just for a couple weeks or so.

LC: Ok. What unit were you attached to at Bitburg?
KB: I was in the 585th Tactical Missile Group.

LC: Ok.

KB: And we managed both of the air – no, the ground-to-ground missiles, the only ones in the Air Force, first the Mace, M-A-C-E, and then the Matador, M-A-T-A-D-O-R.

LC: The –

KB: They were on mobile launchers that we drug through the tundra. Not tundra, I guess. Regular dirt and trees. Although we didn’t move them that often. But we would move them, we had to guard them. One of my additional duties was to go out and set up machine guns in fields of fire and that kind of stuff. The interesting thing about the three sites that we had them at around the perimeter of Bitburg, was the guidance system required multi locations at rural areas throughout northern – eastern Germany, to which I traveled many times, providing personnel guidance and assistance and doing the, ‘We’re here to help you,’ kinds of inspections and that sort of stuff.

LC: Now if somebody didn’t know how the guidance systems worked and why it was necessary to have multiple locations, could you just run through that?

KB: Yeah, there was no pilot. This was a missile.

LC: Yes sir.

KB: But it looked like an airplane. Ok? And it had to know where to go. So we would launch it from somewhere around Bitburg, and it would be picked up and tracked by a not-too-distant communications and guidance squadron location.

LC: Ok.

KB: They would hand it off to another one, they would hand it off to another, and I don’t know how many, depending on where the target was, until the last one at the Cold War border would target it to where it was supposed to go.

LC: Now, at each one of these control centers, about how many people were assigned there?

KB: Thirty to forty-five.

LC: And they were on twenty-four hour rotas, I assume.

KB: Right.
LC: And when you would go to visit these different centers, can you detail a little bit about the kinds of things that you would work with the personnel on?

KB: Oh, just about everything. We’d take a team of four or five specialists, a security guy, a cookson baker guy to make sure their mess halls were alright, I looked at admin, various other things, we had a communications guy who was the primary guy to check out the operation, that sort of thing. That’s the way I recall the teams were structured.

LC: Was there a specialist with you at any time who was responsible for making sure there were no security breaches at this site?

KB: Oh yeah, we took a security guy.

LC: Ok.

KB: In fact, one of my best friends traveled for most of the time that I was there.

LC: Did you have any interface with that end of things? With the security checks or whatever, briefings that you think they had to do?

KB: Yeah, I think I would accompany him on nightly visits to the outposts and that sort of thing, but I had no technical involvement in that.

LC: Right.

KB: But I wanted to check on the morale of the guys, that kind of stuff.

LC: And what observations did you make in general about these small centers with –

KB: These all were extremely well run. I don’t think we replaced one commander in the three years I was there.

LC: Really? No kidding.

KB: Very, very capable people.

LC: And presumably pretty darn dedicated, too. I mean, they’re on twenty-four hour –

KB: Yeah, I think that the security people were. The whole missile concept was a little alien to a fighter pilot. You know, standing on the ground, launching something that you should be flying, but it was such a high profile and priority program that we had the best of the best.

LC: And that was because it was really a frontline for the –
KB: Oh, yeah. There were only three units there. The 38th Tactical Missile Wing was headquartered at Sembach Air Base, they had a number of missiles, there were a number of missiles at Hahn, and there were a number of them at Bitburg.

LC: And as a –

KB: And the exact numbers, I don’t know, and probably shouldn’t tell you.

LC: Right. Ok. But from a personnel point of view, you didn’t have very many problems with these folks.

KB: Oh…

LC: Is that overstating it a bit?

KB: Yeah, I don’t think…disciplinary problems. Lots of administrative problems.

LC: Ok, ok.

KB: For example, there was no promotion system or classification system as there were for most other specialties in the Air Force, because it was so new.

LC: Ok.

KB: And so I convened a weekly classification board of two or three people, one a technical advisor in whatever the specific specialty code was, and evaluate people to raise them from the three level to the five level to the seven level, which were prerequisites to compete for promotion. Very, very important. And then the level and quality of that whole process was singularly important. It didn’t happen anywhere else in the Air Force.

LC: And you kind of had to basically pioneer those structures?

KB: Oh yeah, yeah. I was walking, and a Major said – he was my immediate boss – says, ‘You’re going to have a classification board this afternoon,’ and I said, ‘Yes, sir.’ You know, wow. I had no idea what it was, but we figured it out.

LC: And you were still is it accurate to say a first lieutenant at that point?

KB: I was a first lieutenant when I got there and a captain about halfway in between.

LC: Ok, so you were promoted in here somewhere. Do you remember receiving your promotion?

KB: Nah, that wasn’t any big deal.
LC: Ok, it was –

KB: You knew it was going to happen. It took seven years, then.

LC: Ok. Seven years to captain?

KB: Yup. Long time.

LC: Wow. Yeah, that is a long time. Sounds to me like you earned it, though.

This schedule for the promotions in rank for the personnel in the service –

KB: Yeah, that was for enlisted personnel, incidentally.

LC: Right. Yeah, could you say a little more about the people, the enlisted personnel who were drafted into the missile units? Where there special characteristics about them that put them in that area?

KB: Yeah, they had to complete some really rigorous technical training.

LC: Ok.

KB: So they were – the selection process wasn’t that we took every guy on the street. I don’t know, I was not involved in that, so I don’t know the screening procedures, but I know that there was a highly selective process. We also had – no, we didn’t, we didn’t have that category, but they also had to pass some pretty rigorous requirements to get a secret, minimum secret security clearance. So we didn’t have any bums.

LC: Right.

KB: Yeah, there were management problems, yeah sure. We probably – I don’t know the numbers…

LC: Right.

KB: But, oh, we court-martialed people and we kicked them out of the service and did that.

LC: Yeah, for various –

KB: Not to the extent that perhaps an ordinary unit would have done.

LC: Ok.

KB: And they were very, very well treated. We had excellent, brand-new barracks, three of them in a row, one we used the main floor, the second floor as our offices, and it was right next door to the Officers’ Club, so that was neat.

LC: Now, you were in Germany for…
KB: Three years. At that time, yeah. And back in...
LC: So ’59 to…’62?
KB: July of ’62.
LC: Where there any particular alerts that you remember while you were there?

Around…

KB: I don’t think we had anything other than practice alerts, and we did that
maybe once every three months, and that’s when I would go out and set up the fields of
fire with the machine gun and sit in the foxhole for a day or so.

LC: Do you remember any kind of heightened alert around the time of the Bay of
Pigs operation, for example? Or does that not come to mind at all?

KB: Well, it would have no relevance.

LC: Ok.

KB: Well, yeah, overall. Yeah, overall critical, but I was back in the States when
that happened, and that’s another story, and we can talk about that when we get to it.

LC: Well sure, how about now? This is a good time.

KB: Ok. Let’s close out Bitburg. Very, very rewarding experience, had one of
the finest, highly motivated, meanest commanders in the world, Colonel Fred W. Vetter,
Jr., who later became the secretary to the administrative secretary to the Secretary of
Defense, was promoted a brigadier general, commanded Dover Air Force base, retired
from the Air Force, was a chief of the Delaware State Patrol, maintained a very close
relationship with him, he was my mentor for a number of assignments, and passed away
last August. Outstanding man. Fred W. Vetter, Jr.

LC: Now when General Vetter was working with the secretary of the Air Force,
do you know what years those were?

KB: Yeah, Harold Brown’s years.

LC: Ok.

KB: In the – oh, I guess mid-’60s.

LC: Right at the –

KB: Man, I’m not a walking historian.
LC: That’s alright, but you’re doing great, you’re doing really well. And that would be right at the time of the escalation of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. Did you –

KB: No, prior to that.

LC: Prior to that?

KB: Prior to that.

LC: Ok.

KB: He was around during the Bay of Pigs, I think. I don’t know, we’d have to check.

LC: Oh, ok. Well, we could look that up. But he was a great guy, and he was very helpful to you?

KB: Yeah. A personal mentor to me. I admired him.

LC: And he was – you reported to him when you were at Bitburg?

KB: Through a major.

LC: Ok.

KB: But I had day-to-day contact – I was in his office half a dozen times a day. Very close relationship.

LC: Ok. Just as a general evaluation point, what did you think of the missile systems that the Air Force had at that time?

KB: We never knew. We took them to Tripoli once, when Kadafi was friendlier, and fired them, and had a very excellent – whatever the technical term is, but you know, hit the target. Or hit close to it. And because they were nuclear-tipped, you only had to hit close.

LC: Right, that’s true.

KB: Well, we never fired one in vain, so we don’t know.

LC: Right.

KB: They were very well respected as a significant part of the Western Europe defense element, which included lots of aircraft. But they were highly regarded as part of that triad.

LC: And were they designed specifically to take out airfields within – on the eastern front there?
KB: Yes.

LC: Ok. Do you know how long they stayed within the Air Force inventory, the Matadors?

KB: Yeah, I think the last one went out in 1970.

LC: Ok. That sounds about right.

KB: If you want to check my web page, all the details are there.

LC: Ok, I will. I do have a couple of pieces from the web page, which is helping me navigate the dates on your many assignments. Sir, after Bitburg, where exactly did you go next?

KB: I went to Sandia Base, New Mexico, to the 1090th United States Air Force Special Reporting Wing, that served the field command of the Defense Atomic Support Agency. Mouthful, right?

LC: Yes, sir.

KB: Big, big operation. The entire nuclear program of the United States multi-service joint command, I was the executive officer of the American Support Unit there.

LC: Now by American Support Unit, what does that actually denote?

KB: We managed all of the personnel and administrative activities of the five or six hundred Air Force people that were stationed at Sandia, along with Army, Navy, and Marine Corps people. The base was run by the Army.

LC: Ok, and so you oversaw personnel issues for people from the other services as well?


LC: Ok, so the Air Force people at Sandia.

KB: Promotion separations, the mortuary guy, the Air Force assistance guy, I had thirty additional duty titles.

LC: Thirty?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Wow. Were you trying to farm some of those out to –

LC: No, there was nobody to farm them out to. I was the guy.

LC: You were alone?
KB: Yeah, I was the guy. I had a boss who was a lieutenant colonel, and he wasn’t going to do any of that stuff.

LC: And you had how many people under you, trying to help you with all of this?

KB: Oh, a dozen. Including supply.

LC: Ok, and supply was under you as well?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Wow. And you had about –

KB: Morale, welfare, recreation, although that was run by the Army, who owned the base – well, they didn’t own it. They shared the base with the civilian company, the Sandia Corporation, if you’ve ever heard of that.

LC: Yes sir, I have. That’s –

KB: Bunch in the news these days.

LC: Yeah, that’s right. That’s the private contractors who were running that and hooked up with Los Alamos as well.

KB: Right, yeah. So I had to make sure that the bowling alley was working right, you know, even though I didn’t run it, and the clubs were alright, and the swimming pool worked, you know. Not as the primary guy, but I looked out to make sure it was alright for our guys, and would share with the base commander anything that I found.

LC: Was there any tension amongst all the different service personnel from the different banks of the military?

KB: No, I don’t think so, no.

LC: Everybody got along pretty well?

KB: Yeah, yeah.

LC: And the focus at Sandia –

KB: You know, the Navy guys, when they call the commissary to order steaks, they wouldn’t say ‘I’m Captain Smith,’ they’d say ‘I’m Navy Captain Smith,’ colonel equivalent.

LC: Just to be clear. Right.

KB: That’s just an aside. No, no, I think we got along well.

LC: Ok. And the primary business at Sandia was what, exactly? You’re with the Defense Atomic Support.
KB: That’s right.

LC: What does that mean, actually? What went on there?

KB: We ran all the tests in Nevada, Las Vegas, the Pacific. If it had to do with nuclear, whether it was on land, in the air, or at sea, it was done at Kirtland. Field Command Defense Atomic Support Agency, field command is probably the unique two words to pick up.

LC: Field command?

KB: Right.

LC: Ok.

KB: There was a Defense Atomic Support Agency in Washington, but that was a staff-level. The field command at Sandia, Albuquerque, New Mexico oversaw everything that happened.

LC: And was this the group that previously was the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project?

KB: Boy, have you got your history right. Then became the Defense Nuclear Agency.

LC: Yes sir.

KB: And is now part of the thing that’s in trouble all the time. Whatever it is.

LC: The DOE?

KB: Abraham’s. Department of Energy.

LC: Oh, right, yes, exactly. The DOE. And sir, you were at Sandia Kirtland from 1962 to when?

KB: ’65.

LC: Ok, so you were there three –

KB: Three years.

LC: Ok. Let’s take a break right here, sir.

KB: Ok.
Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins at the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I’m resuming my oral history interview with USAF Lieutenant Colonel Kaye Biggar. Today’s date is the 17th of February, 2004. I am in the interview room in the Special Collections Building on the campus of Texas Tech. Again, Colonel Biggar is in San Antonio. Good afternoon, sir.

Kaye Biggar: Good afternoon.

LC: We were talking about your time at Sandia.

KB: Yes.

LC: And that would be between 1962 and early 1965, I think.

KB: That’s correct.

LC: Ok. And sir, I want to ask you just a couple of questions. You had told us that you had personnel and administrative control over about five hundred to six hundred people at the base.

KB: Yes, I was the executive officer of the Air Force support unit to the Field Command of the Defense Atomic Support Agency, which is a mouthful.

LC: Yes, it is.

KB: But the Army was run – or, the Army ran Sandia Base, and I was number two to the lieutenant colonel, who was in charge of all things, you know like Air Force Deputy Base Commander kind of guy.

LC: Ok, and this was as you said an Army Base with Air Force personnel assigned to it.

KB: Yes.

LC: Were there any –

KB: It was collocated with an Air Force Base called Kirtland Air Force base, and it has since – Kirtland has since taken over the entire operation and Sandia Base no longer exists as a military installation, but the Sandia National Laboratory continues to be there, and it’s one of our four main national laboratories concerned with all things scientific, not just atomic matters.
LC: Now when you were there, were the laboratory functions also going on on Sandia Base?

KB: Oh, very definitely. Yes.

LC: Ok, so can you give an overview of all the different kinds of personnel that were actually on the base? There was Air Force, obviously, and Army, and –

KB: Air Force, Army, Navy, and some Marines even.

LC: Ok. There were Marines there, too?

KB: Oh yeah.

LC: Ok. As well as government contract people?

KB: Oh, government contractors, yes. Sandia National Laboratory at that point in time was run by the Western Electric Corporation.

LC: Ok. And also maybe university personnel?

KB: Yes, I’m not sure of how that worked, I don’t think there was a direct – a large, direct relationship with the University of New Mexico because they weren’t into those fields. But I’m sure there was some contact with whatever engineering operation the University of New Mexico had at that time.

LC: Now as a personnel observer and administrator, did any instances of fractious behavior amongst the different groups of people there come to your attention?

KB: No.

LC: Ok.

KB: No, it was a very homogeneous arrangement. The only exciting thing we had was one time about three hundred and fifty Peace Corps students came through there, I had some extra billeting space, and we offered that up for them to stay a couple, three nights, and boy what a rowdy crowd that was.

LC: Is that right?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Now what happened? Do you remember?

KB: Oh, I think a lot of – I don’t know if there were any actual arrests, but a lot of drunk and disorderly kinds of things. They did have a staff that took care of that, so I didn’t get personally involved going to the drunk tank to pick them up, but my people
arranged to get them showered down and into bed, etc, etc, etc. Now – not to denigrate
the Peace Corps, but they were certainly different than military people.

LC: And were they basically just having a good time that got a little out of hand,
or was there something else?

KB: Yeah, they were on their way to overseas assignments, and it was their last
chance to party in the United States, so you know. Understandable.

LC: So it was a last hurrah kind of thing.

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. Sir, in general, the work of the base had to do with atomic weaponry.

KB: Yes, the Sandia base exclusively, and the Air Force Special Weapons Center
just down the runway on Kirtland Air Force Base was very heavily involved in Air Force
aspects of nuclear power.

LC: Ok. Now did the recent test ban that had been agreed between the United
States and the Soviet Union have any appreciable affect on activities there while you
were there?

KB: No, as a matter of fact we had some very major testing activities that were
done both in Nevada and in the Pacific, and at one point in time we had a very high level
joint task force come in for a short stay, and they were to have been quartered in my
facility, but didn’t actually work out. But that was a high level effort during those
periods of time.

LC: Now was that group of people that might have or was initially scheduled to
come out and see you, were those Department of Defense people?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok.

KB: Headed by…whatever we call it today, but two-star equivalent civilian
people. High connections.

LC: Sir, while you were there, the President of the United States was
assassinated.

KB: That’s right, I can tell you a little bit about that.

LC: That would be great.
KB: In my role of serving as the liaison between the Air Force element at Sandia Base and the local community, I was at a police officer function, I think we had a luncheon and coordinated different things during the course of that, and it was announced at that meeting that the President had been killed, and the meeting immediately broke up and we went to see if we were into an active military posture, which we weren’t. A same, similar circumstance happened during the Cuban crisis, at which when I returned to base we were on high alert. So, just a couple little vinya.

LC: Now, you said that there was no alert after the assassination?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok.

KB: I’m sure that some elements of the military were put into a higher alert status, but there was no overall, worldwide alert status declared, to the best of my recollection.

LC: Ok, and no particular effects on you there at Sandia.

KB: No.

LC: Ok. But during the Cuban Missile Crisis, there had been.

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok. Since I think we skipped over that, could you just mention a little bit more about where you were and how that affected the people you were working with at the time?

KB: Well, I think in order to be ready to react to the worst possible scenario, we all packed up a hundreds – not hundreds, dozens of trucks and went far south into the desert and set up camp and simulated combat conditions over a three day period of time. That was a very exciting and interesting experience, but one I’d probably not want to go through again.

LC: And that’s because you were like everyone, very nervous, sir?

KB: Well, I think so, yeah, the whole country was.

LC: Absolutely, yes. Now sir, after you left Sandia, your next assignment was what?

KB: The Air Weather Service at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

LC: Ok. Now –
KB: Let me tell you just a little — no, you’ve got your questions.

LC: Ooh, well no, you go ahead, and then I’ll chime in.

KB: Let me give you a quick overview.

LC: Sure.

KB: That was the headquarters of the worldwide Air Weather Service. We had about six wings around the world, one in the Pacific, one in Europe, one at SAC headquarters, one at TAC headquarters, etc., to administer the twelve to fifteen and/or more weather service people that were at every Air Force installation in the world. So a pretty far-flung operation.

LC: Mm-hmm.

KB: And in addition to being the commander of the headquarters squadron there, I also functioned in a number of roles and personnel, probably the major one in charge of airmen assignments where I had some fourteen thousand weather observers and forecasters that we managed assignments, travel and all of that from all those far-flung places. Rather interesting job, nothing really exciting, very important day-to-day work, but probably not a lot to talk about.

LC: Well, sir, let me just ask you one or two questions about it. The fourteen thousand observers, now are those all people within the military structure, or are they –

KB: Yes, enlisted people.

LC: Ok. And did they have any particular special training?

KB: Oh yes, very extensive.

LC: Can you talk a little bit about the training process that those people went through?

KB: Oh, I think it was a minimum of like six months at the Air Force technical schools, I think one of the schools was just outside of Chicago at Rantoul, Illinois, the base is closed now and my Alzheimer’s don’t give me an instant recollection of what it was – Chanute. Chanute Air Force Base. All of the officers in Air Weather Service had college degrees in whatever they may have had one but then also additionally in weather. And many of them went to school at the world’s premier weather university, the University of Washington, my home state of Washington, I’m proud to say.
LC: Yes sir, yes sir. And the personnel that you were managing over this very broad network, can you describe what it was that you were actually doing, were you promoting people within, looking for people who might rise to higher levels of responsibility, managing –

KB: Not technically involved in the promotion process, because that was an Air Force-wide program. But I had a very key role in determining which people would be promoted by monitoring the officer and airmen effectiveness reports rendered on them. Now I didn’t write them, but I reviewed them to make sure they were adequate and sent, to lots of people’s dismay down the line, many of them back for rewrites.

LC: Ok. Because they didn’t conform to particular style, or because they were missing content, or what kinds of things?

KB: Oh, yeah, missing content. And typographical errors too. We were very, very restrictive in those programs throughout the Air Force to make sure that we gave our people proper recognition for the jobs that they did.

LC: Sir, was the weather data that the Air Force was generating and that the people you were overseeing generated, was that shared in any way with other branches of the service?

KB: Oh yes. Yeah, with the weather service, the National Weather Service in particular, and we had – have you ever heard of the hurricane hunters?

LC: Yes, sir. The aircraft.

KB: The people that fly into the heart of the hurricane? Those were our guys.

LC: Really.

KB: Yup. Stationed out of, I believe at that time…Mississippi Keesler Air Force Base.

LC: Ok. And so there was sharing with other branches of the military as well? Or did each branch have its own…

KB: I think there was some sharing, but probably the highest level of sharing was with the National Weather Service.

LC: Ok. Ok, so civilian information.

KB: Right.
LC: Ok. Sir, where would you say that the Air Weather Service ranked in terms of Air Force priorities? Was this service given appropriate resources?

KB: Yeah, we were actually at that time, our parent command collocated on that Scott Air Force Base was a military Air Lift Command. And we were subordinate to it.

LC: Ok.

KB: But yeah, I think we rated high priority and had all the resources that were necessary. I was responsible for the eight hundred thousand dollar headquarters building, maintenance and etc of that.

LC: Wow.

KB: I didn’t actually sweep the floors, but on occasion I’d pick up a newspaper or a paper gum wrapper.

LC: I was going to say, candy wrapper. Sir, at this point, now you were there from I think 1965 until the end of ’67, is that correct?

KB: Til…til the middle of – well, yeah kind of…I think I went on my first training, which we’re going to talk about in a minute, and departed there probably in September and maybe had a little leave or something.

LC: Ok.

KB: But I think we’re probably ready – well wait, one more thing.

LC: Ok.

KB: I guess I was picked for this special assignment because of my overall general background, but I became overnight an international political military affairs officer. And I didn’t even know how to spell that.

LC: How is that accomplished, sir?

KB: Well, that’s the kind of billet that they had in Saigon that I was going to fill after I went through this training that we’re going to talk about.

LC: Ok. Well when did you find out that you were going to be leaving Scott and going on a special training mission?

KB: I think much to my wife’s dismay, probably about July.

LC: Ok.

KB: And she was of course, you know like everyone, not overly happy with that, but that’s what I did for a living.
LC: Now you mean her finding out that you’re likely –

KB: Going to Vietnam, to war.

LC: Yes, yes. That your likely assignment would be over there.

KB: Particularly when she found out that I was going to be on the ground.

LC: Right.

KB: In Vietnam. Not as many other Air Force people, who were away from the scene but supporting it from Thailand and other places.

LC: Now you handled that by basically just saying this is my next assignment and that’s how it’s going to look?

KB: Yeah, when I was told to march, I marched.

LC: Ok. And where did you march to?

KB: I marched first to Hurlburt Field of Eglin Air Force Base, which is the home of the Air Force Special Operations. The commandos of the Air Force.

LC: Mm-hmm. And how long were you there?

KB: That was just a two-week course, but it was very intensive and gave me a tremendous outlook at what the combat capabilities of the Air Force were. Anti-air power demonstrations, lots of theory on counter-insurgency and what it’s all about, how to fight it, the same kind of thing that we’re facing in Iraq today and even though we were doing it back then, we’re ill-prepared.

LC: So that two-week course gave way to what?


LC: And how long were you there, sir?

KB: Six weeks.

LC: Ok.

KB: Playing like a Green Beret.

LC: Were you really out in the field doing mockups and –

KB: Yeah, yeah. And Army exercises an hour a day. Running miles and miles and miles.

LC: They worked you hard?

KB: Yeah. And I wasn’t really prepared for that.
LC: Well, I was going to ask you what kind of shape you were in.

KB: A desk jockey.

LC: Was it tough?

KB: It was tough, yeah.

LC: Yeah, I believe it. What else did they have you learning there?

KB: A lot of things about the nature of the war, that it was not a Civil War, the Tonkin Gulf incident. It was a psychological preparation thing in large part. Not much at all about what I would actually be doing when I got to Vietnam.

LC: But they were in effect –

KB: Except to know that I may have been, and I was on occasion, out in the middle of it with the Green Berets with the A Teams. That was not my regular job.

LC: No sir.

KB: But some of the guys that went through that course, that was their job.

LC: Mm-hmm.

KB: In fact one of my closest buddies, a Navy lieutenant commander about a week or two after I got to Saigon called me from the hospital and he just came back severely wounded from a Green Beret A Team Camp.

LC: After having just been out there that short time.

KB: Yeah, just a couple weeks.

LC: So this was an all-services school.

KB: Correct. No Marines.

LC: No Marines?

KB: No Marines.

LC: Why was that?

KB: Well, Marines had their own thing going.

LC: Ok.

KB: And when we talk about Vietnam, I’ll tell you about the Marines.

LC: Ok, great. The instructors at the JFK School, can you – do you remember any of them particularly?

KB: Yeah, primarily Army guys, Green Beret kinds of guys, yeah.

LC: And most of them I’m assuming at this point had been over to Vietnam.
KB: I think probably so. I never ever asked that question, but yeah, my general impression was that they were seasoned veterans.

LC: And they were – what they were trying to get across to you was more sort of the history and the intricacy of the conflict in which the U.S. was involved?

KB: That’s right.

LC: Ok. As opposed to –

KB: As opposed to battlefield tactics and that kind of stuff.

LC: And what was the general, if you remember at all, the sort of rank level of the other people in the class?

KB: Majors and lieutenant colonels.

LC: Ok. At this point you were a major, is that right?

KB: Yes.

LC: Because you had just – you had been promoted while you were at the Air Weather Service, is that right?

KB: Yes, that’s correct. Boy, you’re perceptive.

LC: Well, or well informed, I think. I had an informant, that would be you. So I studied, anyway, what you sent. And just for the sake of the interview want the listeners to be clear that you were a major, and that was pretty standard rank among the others in the classes.

KB: In the classes. But far more than the average rank of the officer in Vietnam. And we’ll get more into that when I tell you what the level of my duties in Vietnam were.

LC: Ok. Yes, because I think they seem to have been quite important duties.

You were at Ft. Bragg, then, for about six weeks you said.

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. Did you have a little leave before you were actually sent over?

KB: Yeah, short leave, three days, and I left the day before Christmas.

LC: Is that right?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Only three days leave? Do you remember what you did, sir?

KB: Kind of helped to get my wife settled, although she was already settled.

LC: Now where was she going to be?
KB: Enjoyed the three days.
LC: Where was she going to be living while you were gone?
KB: She stayed in Albuquerque.
LC: Ok. And did you own a home out there, or…
KB: At one time we did, but she lived in a high-rise apartment during the time
that I was in Vietnam.
LC: Ok. Now did you have an agreement with her as to her not worrying or
something like that while you were gone?
KB: Oh, I don’t know if there’s anything specific like that. She was adjusted to
the military.
LC: Now did you set up any kind of arrangement about writing back and forth, or
any of that?
KB: Oh yeah, we corresponded regularly. And I sent photographs.
LC: Ok.
KB: Some of which you have.
LC: Yes sir, I have them actually in front of me. I have a few of them anyway.
KB: The one thing that we threw away when Vietnam wasn’t a very popular
topic was my daily correspondence, which would have been interesting to still have, but I
don’t, unfortunately.
LC: Yes, ok, ok. Yes, that’s a shame. But maybe we can reconstruct some of the
events, anyway, here in the course of this interview.
KB: Yeah, I think so.
LC: Sir, you said you left on the 24th of December. What was your route over to
Vietnam?
KB: It was to Travis Air Force Base, where I was supposed to take some
weapons training, but I had already had much more extensive weapons training at Ft.
Bragg, and I had a letter to say that was waived.
LC: Ok, so you continued on through then?
KB: Yeah. Travis Air Force Base all the way to Tan Son Nhut Air Base – no, we
stopped in the Philippines.
LC: Ok.
KB: Stopped in the Philippines.

LC: Did you stay on the plane or get off?

KB: I got off, but got back on again. It was not an overnight stay.

LC: Ok. When you arrived at Tan Son Nhut, was it nighttime? Or day?

KB: It was...yeah, I think it was nighttime just before dawn breaking, because it was kind of an eerie feeling. They took away all of my American money, and gave me whatever piasters, the Vietnamese version of currency, because we weren’t supposed to have any dollars because of the black market kind of stuff.

LC: Ok.

KB: Put us in a bus and took us to a billet hotel processing center in Cholon. Part...it’s just outside of downtown Saigon.

LC: Yes, the Chinese area.

KB: Yeah, hey, you know.

LC: Yes, that’s right.

KB: Well, one look at that place, and I said, ‘I don’t want any of this, I’m a big boy,’ and so I got me one of those little yellow and blue...not Peugeot, whatever the other French car name is…

LC: Renault?

KB: What?

LC: A Renault?

KB: A Renault, yeah. Taxis, and went directly to the Rex Hotel in the downtown center of Saigon, walked in and said I’m here, give me a room. And they quickly told me, it doesn’t work that way.

LC: Oh really?

KB: Yeah, and they told me where to go, about three blocks down the street, which was the billeting office, and I think I had the foresight to have the cabbie wait.

LC: Very good.

KB: And so...you know, because I had five hundred pounds of luggage, or whatever. Not that much, but a hell of a lot of stuff.

LC: Uh-huh. Now what were you bringing over there?
KB: Lots of fatigues, clothes, personal effects, my tape recorder, and other
personal items that I wanted to have, I think I had four bags and a – four bags and a
briefcase.

LC: Ok, yeah, that’s pretty good.

KB: So, he took me down to this other place, and I got out, and while I was
fumbling around to pay him, I dropped my ID card. And didn’t realize it, and so I was
walking a little bit further down the street to go to this billeting office, and this guy comes
running after me, and I thought, ‘Oh my God, what’s going on?’ You know? That was
kind of a scary moment at that point in time after no sleep for twenty-four hours and
being in a strange land, etc, etc, but so on for that. He was bringing me my ID card. And
that was typical of the – the Vietnamese for the most part were very, very happy that we
were there and were very cooperative.

LC: So you went in and got some sleep, I assume.

KB: No, I went in and they said, ‘Ok, we’re going to put you in the tax building,’
which is a commercial building and also the government tax office, right across the street
from the Rex Hotel. So it was really pretty nice, as far as location and that sort of thing.
The rooms were crummy. I originally shared a room with an Australian lieutenant
colonel and about two or three days later I found out that there was another guy that had a
private room, and he wasn’t in it – no, it was a room for two, but he wasn’t in it because
he stayed someplace else because of his duty.

LC: Ok.

KB: And I talked him into letting me have that room, so essentially I had a
private little room, with a refrigerator and a toilet and two beds and an air conditioner that
didn’t work.

LC: Oops.

KB: On the second floor of the tax building, which housed a discotheque that
played loud music, but they did shut it off at nine o’clock directly at night.

LC: Oh, well I bet you were thankful for that.

KB: Yeah.

LC: Yeah. Sir, did you have orders to MACV headquarters at that time?

KB: Yes, I did.
LC: Ok.

KB: But, we’ll talk about that. But yes, I was an advisor in MACV headquarters, but there’s much more to talk about.

LC: Ok, well you can go ahead and lead us on, if you want to.

KB: Ok. Acclimation, I guess I went to that two-day orientation thing by taxi from my tax quarter billet.

LC: Ok, now where was that?

KB: Pardon me?

LC: Where was that held?

KB: That was back in Cholon.

LC: Ok.

KB: My daily routine began by catching a shuttle bus just outside my building and going to where I work, which was USAID II Headquarters office building, and I’ll tell you more about that later.

LC: Ok.

KB: Probably it’s the time to talk about that.

LC: Ok, go ahead. That’d be great.

KB: While I was assigned technically to MACV, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam Headquarters, I worked with USAID, the United States Agency for International Development People. State department people, an office of the special assistant people code named CIA.

LC: Got it.

KB: Worked in this three story, pretty good shape office building, in kind of a residential area. In fact the front entrance to it was beautiful, you’ve got pictures of that.

LC: Mm-hmm, yes sir.

KB: And hardly anyone ever went in there, it was a very serene operation, but the back end of that thing was a madhouse. It was the motor pool and the operations and all of that, and strangely enough on one side of it was the pagoda that you’ve got a picture of.

LC: Oh is that right?

KB: Yes, that was an interesting thing.
LC: Oh, uh-huh. Did you have anything to do with those – the back end operations where things were so busy back there?

KB: Oh yeah. Yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: Air America was back there, and we’ll talk more about Air America later.

LC: Uh-huh, sure. I’m making a list.

KB: And that was where I came in and had my ham and egg sandwich and went to work.

LC: Ok.

KB: Ham and egg sandwich in a little lean-to, canvas-covered, makeshift thing.

LC: And did you get that on the street, sir, or where’d you get the food?

KB: No, it was in this compound in the rear of the USAID II headquarters.

LC: Ok. And in the USAID II building, were there any other groups who had their HQ there?

KB: Yes. And I’ll go into that.

LC: Ok.

KB: It was the...it was the brain center of everything that happened in Vietnam except military operations. Now, military operations also had some people that worked in the pacification area, and we’ll talk more about, they were called Combined Action Platoons and up in I Corps, the northern provinces where the Marines held stay, and we’ll talk more about that, they had similar operations. But I was in the Plans and Programs division of Headquarters MACV Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Division, working for a guy named Clay McManaway, who was a senior civilian in the CORDS operation. He later became ambassador to Haiti. And apparently didn’t do too good a job, with what’s going on down there now.

LC: When was he the ambassador, sir, do you know –

KB: I don’t know, back…back…

LC: In the ‘80s?

KB: I think in the ‘80s or whenever it was that we were in there and cleaned the place up. I think he was in charge of that.

LC: Oh, ok.
KB: Then we left and it went downhill.

LC: Yes.

KB: But that’s another story.

LC: Yes sir.

KB: But he was a bright, bright sort of guy, he worked directly for Ambassadors Komer and Colby, and you know who they are.

LC: Well that would be Robert Komer.

KB: That’s right. The dynamite guy that went over there and really started all of the pacification and the revolutionary developments support work.

LC: And Bill Colby.

KB: Bill Colby, who became the director of Central Intelligence Agency. And took much of the heat for went on – for what went on over there, particularly the Phoenix Program, which I’ll talk to you in detail about.

LC: Ok, super. Now, tell me about McManaway’s background. Do you know anything about where he went to school or where he was from or other postings he had?

KB: Gee, I read his bio years ago. I think he was from somewhere in the south, North or South Dakota or something, had served I think two years in the Army, and then went into relatively high level civil service and wound up where he was as this kind of guy and then an ambassador. So obviously a very talented kind of guy.

LC: Now Kaye, did you report directly to him?

KB: No, I reported to a guy named Larry Marinelli.

LC: How do you spell his last name?

KB: M-A-R-I-N-E-L-L-I.

LC: Ok.

KB: He was a...a reserve civil servant. I’m trying to think of what they called them. State department kind of guy.

LC: Ok.

KB: Very, very brilliant. Very brilliant, I had no problem working for that young twenty-nine-year-old because he was so sharp and because he turned off – turned over almost all of his operation to me to look after for him.

LC: Uh-huh. Are you still there, sir?
KB: Yes.

LC: Ok, good.

KB: He was in charge of the twenty-five to thirty man operation in Plans and Programs or CORDS at the USAID II building.

LC: Ok. And did McManaway also work in USAID II?

KB: No. He worked at the headquarters MACV at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, where I traveled back and forth daily, and we’ll talk more about that.

LC: Ok. Now, can you describe your brief? What was it that you were actually assigned to do?

KB: Ok. I was the only Air Force officer in CORDS. There were in Marinelli’s unit two Army lieutenant colonels and a major who were primarily involved in money things. Funding. Putting together budgets and stuff like that.

LC: Ok.

KB: Marinelli looked at my background and saw that I had been a division chief at Scott Air Force Base, and that meant far more to him that it probably really should have meant. But it was fortunate for me that that caught his eye, and he said, ‘I want you to take over this twenty-five to thirty person conglomerate that nobody knows what the other guy is doing, and make it work.’

LC: Ok.

KB: And that was right up my alley, so I did that. And started reading all the correspondence, handing out the tasking assignments to the civilians, organized the three secretaries into a secretarial pool, brought the three noncommissioned officers together and made them show up for work, do stuff like that. They were a unique bunch. Sergeant Barry, who was the senior guy, was the typical Army sergeant that can get anything anywhere as long as he gets it at night.

LC: Ok.

KB: One of the other kids was named Durbrow, his father had been a previous ambassador to Vietnam, and he was very helpful in the fact that he grew up as a kid in Vietnam in Saigon and knew every street and every back alley that there was.

LC: And overall, what was this group of about thirty people, what was their function, what were they actually doing?
KB: They were Plans and Programs officers to direct tasking and guidance in these areas: Public Relations, Public Safety, Psychological Operations, Chieu Hoi, which we’ll talk more about. You know how to spell that?

LC: Yes I do. Go ahead sir, though.


LC: Yes sir.

KB: The Revolutionary Development Cadre, did I say Public Safety and Public Relations?

LC: Yes you did.

KB: Ok then, probably most importantly, the Phoenix Program, and you know what that is.

LC: Yes, yes, and you’ll tell us a little bit more about that, too.

KB: Yeah.

LC: And so you had this staff that you were in charge of, sort of making run.

KB: The administrative guy, yeah.

LC: Ok. You were making them run just like you had in previous assignments?

KB: Right.

LC: And –

KB: And I had two guys that were part of that group but that served most of their time out in the field, living in the Vietnamese villages as their kind of eyes and ears to give us feedback as to what the programs that we were developing and having other people implement were doing. So that was, you know, they’d come in and say hey, this doesn’t work, change it.

LC: Ok. Were they assigned to a particular corps area?

KB: They – yeah, they were, I think they were both in III Corps but in two separate villages, and I would go out occasionally and spend some time with them.

LC: Ok. Can you tell us their names?

KB: Yeah. One was named Shipley, and his father was senior executive in AP, Associated Press.

LC: Ok.
KB: The other one was Frank Bigalow of the Bigalow carpet dynasty. These were the kinds of caliber of guys that we had.

LC: And it sounds like a pretty sharp team.

KB: Yeah, it was, very.

LC: Ok. And was it basically a stationary team in terms of personnel over the time you were there?

KB: Yeah, over the period – well, I was only there for a year. Yeah, I don’t think we had many changes. A couple of guys came in during that period of time, yeah.

LC: Ok. Now, Kaye, can you speak for just a moment about the structural relationship between Plans and Programs and the rest of CORDS?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: We put together what to do, and not that we were powerful, told them what to do and they carried it out. For example, the public safety, just to give you a caliber there, the head guy in public safety was the former chief of police in New York City.

LC: Who was that?

KB: Can’t think of his name right now. Italian name, but it doesn’t come.

LC: Ok.

KB: And he must have had a hundred retired policemen or police types that worked for him in advising the Vietnamese police department on what to do on a daily basis.

LC: Ok.

KB: So we told them, you know, what it was that commander of MACV wanted them to do, and they went and did it. I didn’t do that, although for about a week I worked in Saigon City Hall, right after Tet.

LC: Ok, I’ll ask you about that too, because of course TET figures –

KB: That’s going to take a few minutes.

LC: Yeah, it figures largely in your experience over there. But it’s interesting to hear the relationship between the group that you were with and the rest of CORDS. So you were in fact kind of making up…
KB: I was a go-between guy. And I also served as a part-time executive officer to the Number Two Civilian, there was a Number One Civilian, in the CORDS II setup.

LC: Which was who?

KB: Good, good, good thinking. Maynard. Leonard Maynard. He was a general officer equivalent. Gave me a nice write up.

LC: Ok. And you performed sort of administrative backup?

KB: I was the go – the go-to guy. If anybody needed to have a piece of paper coordinated, they knew to go see that Air Force major in Plans and Programs, because he’s easy.

LC: And he could make it happen.

KB: Yeah. Or I could make it not happen.

LC: Oh, ok. Make things go away if they needed to.

KB: Yeah, I could send them back and they would have to redo it.

LC: Ok.

KB: I didn’t always rely just on my judgment, although I had a pretty good feel for everything that was going on, but I’d grab one of my guys who was the expert in that area and say, ‘Hey, look at this and tell me if we got to hack off on it or not.’

LC: Ok. Right. Now you mentioned, Kaye, also that another area within Plans and Programs was Public Relations. Can you talk about the general duties there?

KB: Yeah, we didn’t do much in that area because that was a province of JUSPAO. Have you ever heard of that?

LC: Yes.

KB: Joint United States Public Affairs Office. The guys that conducted the five o’clock follies. Do you know what that’s all about?

LC: Yeah. Go ahead and – go ahead and tell us a little for somebody -

KB: Yeah, I had a buddy in that I used to go to those occasionally.

LC: Now for somebody who didn’t get that reference, what is that?

KB: Well, it was a briefing at five o’clock every evening on the front steps of the JUSPAO headquarters, which were probably the most ingrained, uncontrolled group in Vietnam. They did their thing the way they wanted to do it.

LC: And did it bear much relationship to reality, would you say?
KB: That’s a question in most everybody’s mind.
LC: Ok.
KB: But the thrust of the five o’clock follies was the body count, which was one of the biggest mistakes we ever made.
LC: Why do you say that, sir?
KB: Well, because it didn’t mean anything.
LC: Ok.
KB: There were so many bodies, that if we killed fourteen thousand a day, you know, the war would never be over.
LC: Kind of a false indicator, you would say?
KB: A false indicator, yeah, because a lot of people we were killing, this comes out in the Phoenix Program, weren’t enemy combatants.
LC: Ok. Now what about –
KB: I’d better be careful about that.
LC: Oh, no, I think it’s a lot of it’s been you know, revealed at this point in the secondary literature.
KB: Ok.
LC: But only say what you’re comfortable with saying, and you know that. Now the Psy-Ops part of Plans and Programs, what was that about?
KB: Can I take just a quick break?
LC: Oh, sure. There you go. Sir, I had asked you in general terms about the Psy-Ops work and what that looked like. What was the general parameters of that work?
KB: That was dropping leaflets and aircraft that flew constantly over the entire – well, not the entire, but major population centers, broadcasting propaganda, if you want to call it that. Psychological Operations. But to tell them you know, don’t consort with the Viet Cong and cooperate with the government.
LC: Now, these programs that you’ve talked about, advising the police, some PR work, Psy-Ops, were those sort of fully-fledged programs by the time you were assigned in Saigon?
KB: Oh no, this was all relatively new.
LC: Ok, it was taking shape.
KB: It had been going on in a very piecemeal fashion, but it was just pulled
together shortly before I got there, maybe six months.

LC: Ok, because CORDS itself had just kind of begun to gel.

KB: It came into existence in May of ’67, I believe, on paper.

LC: Right.

KB: And then it took a while to pull all of the disparate elements together, and I
guess we never had them pulled together until we left.

LC: Well, it sounds like you were at the forefront anyway of that effort.

KB: I was in the middle of it; I was not a big deal.

LC: Ok, well.

KB: But I was…majors and lieutenant colonels were something that people
listened to.

LC: Sure, that’s right. As you say, that was pretty high in the pecking order in
terms of people deployed on the ground over there. Sir, can you describe the Chieu Hoi?

KB: Just a minute.

LC: Sure.

KB: Excuse me just a minute.

LC: I was asking if you could describe the Chieu Hoi program.

KB: Yeah. Chieu Hoi program were the people that came over from the other
side, and we tried to reindoctrinate them.

LC: Mm-hmm.

KB: A lot of positive aspects of that, a lot of negative publicity about the people
that we had in the underground prisons.

LC: Can you talk a little bit more about the positive aspects to it?

KB: I think, Laura, I’m going to have to call you –

LC: Now sir, I was asking you about the Plans and Programs office and
specifically if you had a general overview that you could offer of the Chieu Hoi program
and you told us that that was primarily about people turning themselves in and that it had
some positive aspects to it, although it got bad publicity.

KB: Yeah, it was a repatriation effort that for the most part was very successful.

There were a lot of them that went back again to the other side under pressure, but we did
get some good people to come with us and did have that one, maybe more, but at least
that one badass back to the pictures that the newspapers got out of the people in the
underground cages with the bars over the top and how they threw them the food. You
know, that bad stuff.

LC: Right, right.
KB: That probably happened.
LC: Do you know whether it happened or not? Do you recall anything?
KB: I have no personal knowledge.
LC: And did you get a sense, or in fact intelligence at any point that Chieu Hoi
program was being sort of double played by VC or NVA defectors, that they were
coming into the program under the guise of turning themselves in? Do you know
anything about that?
KB: I had no personal knowledge of that, but I’m sure that happened.
LC: Ok. And sir, can you please tell us about the –
KB: Boy you know a lot about Vietnam.
LC: Well, I’m supposed to, that’s my – that’s my job.
KB: Oh, ok.
LC: I don’t know everything, that’s for darn sure, and I know that you know
things I don’t know, I just have to get to them. So for example, maybe you know some
things that aren’t generally known about the RD Cadre program?
KB: I did not get that deeply involved in that.
LC: Ok.
KB: Except to know that the Revolutionary Development support people were
called – there were two parts to that. The RF and the PF, have you heard of that?
LC: Yes. Go ahead and –
KB: Regional Forces and…
LC: Provincial?
KB: Provincial Forces. Yeah. No, I – to my – yeah, I think I did visit a base
camp of them once, but it was for a very brief time and I don’t think I have any special
insight into that. You probably have more generalized information than I do.
LC: With each of the programs that were within the Plans and Programs
grouping, were there particular subheads who were administratively responsible for that
group, and then they reported to you?

KB: Oh yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: We had one of our twenty-five member staff, or two, that were specialists in
each of these areas.

LC: Ok. Now you mentioned the police chief I think from New York.

KB: Yeah.

LC: He was in charge of the public safety area.

KB: Right.

LC: Do you remember some of the other sort of, if you want, program heads that
worked with you?

KB: Not that I’ve got anything like I could say you know, the guy was the former
District Attorney or you know, that sort of thing. The example of the police chief, to my
knowledge, I don’t know another name…well, I didn’t even know his name. Or I knew
it, but I can’t recall it.

LC: Can’t recall it, yeah.

KB: But they were people of that caliber. These were not guys off the street.
These were people that headed each of these areas with very outstanding professional
qualifications, although at this stage, much of this stuff was preliminary and nobody was
an expert in anything.

LC: Right, because you were all just kind of inventing it as you went along.

KB: Yeah, that’s right, yeah.

LC: And how much –

KB: Based on things that had happened before, but never to the extent that this
revolution- Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support effort, as we talked
about, was spearheaded by Komer then taken over by Colby, and was a very, very major
part and probably the thing that would have worked in Vietnam if we’d had a chance to
let it go.
LC: Mm-hmm. But the program was getting interrupted by military operations, and particularly by TET.

KB: Yes. Oh, yes. TET threw us for a loop, but we were the ones that made that TET recovery, and I’ll tell you what I did in my small way to make that work.

LC: Yes sir. Well let’s go ahead and consider that.

KB: Let me just tell you a little bit more about the operations, just so you can see you know, my little role in that.

LC: That’ll great, yeah.

KB: I served on the general – the RVN, the Republic of Vietnam General Mobilization staff as an advisor to that Vietnamese group.

LC: Ok.

KB: I served on the Delta Transportation Committee. I also served as a CORDS liaison to Air America. So you can see I had many hats and did lots of stuff, but you know, as a – not as a more of as a runner, but as a coordinator.

LC: Mm-hmm. Keeping things flowing.

KB: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Now –

KB: And after I got the office pretty well organized, my stature seemed to go up from riding around in my three guys stolen jeep, I’m sure it was stolen, to getting an International Harvester SUV that day to then getting a staff car and a driver. So, my standing logistically elevated considerably in my first month or so there. For whatever that’s worth.

LC: And –

KB: And that leads me to the other point, I would go at least once a day from USAID II headquarters in downtown Saigon out to MACV headquarters in Tan Son Nhut, usually late in the day, to take all of the work that had been done by the staff that day – staff studies, paper for general, papers for ambassador, and go up, and in many instances, walk those through for coordination with the major elements of the MACV staff. So I had a pretty good understanding of who the players were.

LC: Because you were actually over there every day, more or less.
KB: Yes. And while I met once very briefly with Komer and a couple, three
times with Colby, I usually would wind up dumping my stuff at the lap of their exec
general, good old what’s-his-name.

LC: Forsythe?

KB: No, a one-star general.

LC: Hmm.

KB: I’ll think of it.

LC: Ok. I didn’t quite have that to hand, unfortunately. Well, your –

KB: So I did, I did have that level of contact. I also read everything, message
traffic-wise that went in and out every day from headquarters, MACV, wherever it was
around the country and had access to the back channel traffic from General
Westmoreland and the ambassador.

LC: By back channel traffic, you mean…

KB: The stuff nobody reads but them and the President.

LC: Ok.

KB: Or, whoever the President might decide he wanted to read it.

LC: That was material going to and from DC, then?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok.

KB: And occasionally to the ambassadors in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand.

LC: Ok. And I would imagine that all of that traffic picked up considerably at
the end of January and into February of 1968.

KB: Yeah, and that was a couple weeks that I was away from it. I don’t know
that it picked up that much, that heavy. It was heavy – oh, it would take me four hours
every morning to read that stuff.

LC: Really?

KB: Yeah, and to decide what I needed to do with something that may have
pertained to us.

LC: And was – that was, I assume, the principle purpose for your monitoring all
of this?

KB: Right.
LC: Was to see programmatic implications?

KB: Right.

LC: Ok. And what time did you get to work in the morning? Can you –

KB: Oh, usually before seven, then we’d break at 11:30 till 2:00, Vietnamese-style, for whatever they called that.

LC: Ok.

KB: And then we would come back and work till eight, nine, ten o’clock at night.

LC: Ok. So you were pretty busy, day after day after day with all of this administrative work.

KB: Oh yeah, seven days a week.

LC: Ok.

KB: You know once in a while, Larry would say, ‘Hey, go take the afternoon off.’ Or you know, ‘Take a day off. Don’t come in tomorrow.’

LC: But in general –

KB: Not very often.

LC: Yeah. In general you were – you had –

KB: It was war.

LC: Yeah, you had your foot down. Sir, where were you when the TET Offensive began, and how –

KB: I was under my bed.

LC: I was going to say, how did you find out about it? What happened?

KB: Rockets.

LC: Ok.

KB: That landed very near my room. No fragments, nothing hit, I was all right, but I was under that bed.

LC: Now this was in the tax building?

KB: Tax building, yeah. Second floor.

LC: Do you know what the date was?

KB: Yeah. What was the date of Tet? The 31st of January, 1968.

LC: Ok, so you –

KB: The real Tet. Tet came every year.
LC: Yes, that’s right. This was the last day of Tet, in fact, the 31st of January. The last day of the festival.

KB: Yeah, when we were supposed to have had all the mutually agreed upon ceasefires.

LC: Right, that –

KB: That only the United States honored.

LC: That’s right. And what was the city like that morning?

KB: Ok, you got pictures.

LC: Yes, sir.

KB: The front of the tax building, you had to walk, literally walk, around bodies, step by step, because they were all living there twenty-four hours a day, cooking, sleeping, eating, and selling black market goods. Wall-to-wall, sidewalk full. Every day, twenty-four hours a day, until TET. Look at those pictures, the streets are empty. Completely empty, with exception of a rolled-up newspaper here or there.

LC: Mm-hmm.

KB: Dramatic, dramatic.

LC: Was there any warning at all, sir? Was there any rumblings the night before that you remember, or people getting out of the street, or any of that?

KB: Not that I remember.

LC: Ok.

KB: I’m sure MACV and General Weyand who was in charge of the II Corps – III Corps forces brought in a number of people from the Cambodian border and had them take up positions around Saigon, and he alone was probably the only guy that paid any attention to the intelligence and did that. Had he not had done that, things would have turned out much, much different in my personal, and many people’s professional viewpoints.

LC: Yes, sir. And he had brought some forces into town. Were they in evidence, at least in your travels on the 31st?

KB: No. The initial reaction the night of Saigon, and I had been at a party at the embassy earlier that evening, coincidentally.

LC: Oh, is that right? Uh-huh. What was that party about?
KB: And there was no visible different kind of security than the little white mice, which we called laughingly the Vietnamese police, wore white shirts.

LC: Mm-hmm.

KB: Of the American Army Military Police, who did most of the fighting in the initial hours at three o’clock in the morning.

LC: Right.

KB: And were responsible for taking the embassy back.

LC: So that evening, everything seemed fine to you.

KB: Yeah, yeah, it was a normal evening, you know at that time, this was pretty good duty.

LC: Yes sir.

KB: It was, you know, not a nice place to be, and not away from home, but you know, I used to go to the international club and have dinner, and stuff like that.

LC: And the party that night, do you remember what it was – what the occasion was? Was it because of Tet?

KB: No, I don’t think so. I think it was a birthday or something, maybe even for the guy. Yeah, maybe it was his birthday, the guy that shot the Vietnamese, Colonel…

LC: Blunn? Of the head of the police?

KB: No, no, no. American retired colonel who was chancery head in the embassy…another name I can’t remember at all.

LC: That’s ok. But it made have been a party around that kind of occasion, a birthday or something.

KB: Yeah, more than it was in celebration of Tet.

LC: Ok. And you just went home as you normally would after?

KB: Yeah, yeah about ten o’clock.

LC: Ok. And that morning, early that morning, you heard the rockets and you scrambled under the bed?

KB: Yeah, about three o’clock in the morning.

LC: Ok. And how long did you stay in the room?
KB: I stayed in the room I think until midday, when whoever was – there was an Army colonel who was kind of – I’d never met him until then, but he was kind of the building head guy, the ranking guy in the building.

LC: Ok. And he sort of –

KB: And he came around and knocked on all our doors and had a roster that we put for security. We were not secured in the tax building by any MPs or anything of that sort. We did have a gated front door we locked at night, but anybody could have broken into that. But he put us all on guard duty, and I think we had three M-17s, which were a larger rifle than the M-16. And we would trade those, we all had .45s or whatever.

LC: Right.

KB: But when we reported for guard duty – and I think there was only one of us on at a time, we would be given one or two of those weapons.

LC: Now did he put you on the rota as well for the guard duty?

KB: Pardon me?

LC: Did he put you on the rota for guard duty? Were you actually on the schedule?

KB: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

LC: And how long did you have to –

KB: Oh, I think we had eight-hour tours for about two weeks.

LC: Really?

KB: Yeah.

LC: And how long until you actually left the building itself and got back to USAID II?

KB: Three days.

LC: What, if anything, did you see, or hear during those days?

KB: I was pinned down on the street under one of the flower carts on Tu Do Street by a sniper on a roof for about two hours.

LC: Really? How did you come to –

KB: Yeah. First day.

LC: Was that when you were on guard duty?

KB: No, I was going out to get some breakfast around the corner.
LC: And he took a shot at you?
KB: Yeah.
LC: And you scrambled under the cart?
KB: Right.
LC: Wow. Two hours?
KB: Yeah, about two hours, and the white mice, give credit to them. I don’t know what they did, I didn’t see them catch him or anything, but they were all over the rooftop of that building, and I finally felt it was ok to come out, and nothing ever happened.
LC: Did the shots, or shot, come close to you?
KB: No.
LC: Ok. But you knew he was up there.
KB: Yeah.
LC: Ok. What else did you hear or observe, in addition to that probably very harrowing experience?
KB: Oh, gee, we did everything wonderful. It was like, I don’t know, we would go to the top of the Rex Hotel sometimes early in the afternoon, if we knew there was going to be some action across the river.
LC: Right.
KB: And watch everything happen, watch the tremendous firefights, and particularly the aerial bombing and shooting. Like you know, being really in a movie in a war.
LC: Yeah, and other people from MACV or CORDS that you knew were up there as well?
KB: Yeah.
LC: Ok. And what’d you do, have a drink, have dinner, and watch the –
KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that sounds terrible, but you’re right. Yeah.
LC: But I just wonder, the atmosphere must have been very strange.
KB: And that didn’t happen every day.
LC: No, no. No. But very strange atmosphere.
KB: Oh yeah. Yeah.
LC: And –
KB: From it being, you know, half a mile away.
LC: Yeah.
KB: And a river in between you. And you’re sitting there, having a drink. It’s a weird feeling.
LC: Very strange. Yeah, and I think it’s important to convey some of that, you know, some of those disconnects in a way about the whole experience. Your – did you go back to USAID then after a couple, three days, you said?
KB: Yeah.
LC: And what was –
KB: Continued my routine.
LC: Ok, was it still a routine, or was it a little more charged up because of all this?
KB: Oh, it was always busy.
LC: Yeah, ok.
KB: But it was a couple, I don’t know, three days after that. I unfortunately don’t have the dates of the – well yeah, I do have some reference points that I’ll cover.
LC: Ok, uh-huh. Go ahead.
KB: That – I was – Larry. Larry said, ‘Ok, you’re going to go deliver the money.’ And I said, ‘What?’ And he said, ‘Oh yeah, I haven’t told you about that yet. You and a Vietnamese Army major are going to get in an Air America C-45’ – and there’s some pictures of that you got – ‘and you’re going to fly around the country and take real money. Millions and millions of dollars of piasters. Well, the little Vietnamese major’s going to have the money in his briefcase, and you’re going to go see that as far as you can tell, he gives it to the right person.’ And we did that.
LC: And what was –
KB: Most of the provinces in I Corps and about a dozen provinces in IV Corps.
LC: And you flew into almost every province, then?
KB: Yes. Yeah. You got pictures of that, too.
LC: Uh-huh. In the course of about how long did it take you to make all these stops?
KB: Oh, two weeks.

LC: Ok. And who was the South Vietnamese major that you were with?

KB: I have no idea; there were two of them.

LC: Two different guys?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Uh-huh.

KB: And that’s the only time we ever saw each other.

LC: Ok. Did you get along with them ok?

KB: Well to be quite frank, I didn’t speak Vietnamese; they may have spoken good English, but we didn’t get involved in a one-on-one buddy chat, he sat in his seat and I sat in my seat and after we’d introduced ourselves, you know, politely, and that was about the extent of it. It was business.

LC: Ok. What about the crew of the aircraft? How many people from Air America?

KB: Two – pilot and a copilot in that airplane.

LC: And did you stay with the same aircraft and crew the whole time?

KB: No, different crews, different times.

LC: Really?

KB: And different airplanes; I’ll talk to you about that too.

LC: Ok, sure, go ahead and tell me.

KB: That was the main thing, the little C-45, unarmed, on retrospect, kind of a scary experience at the time. That was the job that needed to be done.

LC: And the –

KB: We would usually meet with the province senior advisor, an American guy, and the province chief to give the money. But in many instances, they were dead, and so there’d be some stand-in that the Vietnamese major had some understanding of who or what he was looking for. I couldn’t tell you whether it was a Viet Cong stand-in or not, but he seemed to know.

LC: And the U.S. official that was there, was that usually an AID employee, or…

KB: No, it was military.

LC: It was a military guy?
KB: Lieutenant colonel, in most cases.

LC: Ok. And –

KB: With a notable except- well, that’s a whole different story.

LC: Oh, well go ahead and tell it.

KB: And it gives you a time frame. I went in to Hue, imperial city of Hue, you know where that was, one of the major, major battles, two days after the Marines theoretically, or officially, or whatever, had taken it back. Wrong. They hadn’t taken it back at all. Well, yeah, they had for the most part, but there was still a lot of crap going on.

LC: Ok.

KB: I went up there. The province senior advisor was killed, was shot in the head through the windshield of his car.

LC: Ok.

KB: And I was sent up there to kind of assess the situation, give a little interim guidance until a new guy arrived on the scene, etc, etc, etc. One of my most scary moments. The same little C-45, unarmed – no. Yeah. It was, that was. It was when they came to get me out. Yeah, ok. Took me in, dropped me off at the end of the runway, and took off. And I you know, said, ‘Jesus Christ, where am I?’

LC: They left you there, right?

KB: Yeah. And so I kind of got back into the bushes a little bit to see what was going to go on, and pretty soon a jeep come screaming down the runway with an Army sergeant or something in it and he says, ‘Biggar!’ I came out of the bushes and said, ‘Yes.’ He says, ‘Get in, we’re getting out of here.’ And they took me back to the headquarters, which I think was partially destroyed. And we looked at the car, and bullet hole, and I stayed for a couple, three days, made some calls back to Saigon asking for some interim guidance and that sort of stuff.

LC: Right.

KB: And then the new guy showed up from some place. He wasn’t new to the business, he came from a smaller province, and they came in this time to get me in a French airplane called the Pilateous, P-I-L-A-T-E-O-U-S.

LC: Ok.
KB: Pilate, P-I-L-A-T-E.
LC: The Pilateous Pilate?
KB: Right. It was a French airplane with a C-130 turbo prop jet engine.
LC: Ok.
KB: It could climb almost straight into the sky. The purpose for it was to go into places where the Viet Cong would wait at the end of the airfield to take out airplanes.
LC: Ok, yeah.
KB: This rascal in about five hundred feet would point its nose up and go straight up, and I was in one that had this – it was set up for the pilot and three passengers. I was in one this one time that there were five of us. They diverted it in to pick me up when they found out how dangerous it was getting out of there. That had five people in it, and what a ride that was.
LC: Just basically almost vertical right of the...
KB: Yeah. Yeah. Like jets can do.
LC: Wow. That hit you with some G’s.
KB: Oh yeah. Yeah, That was fun. And I don’t think I even had a seatbelt.
LC: And you were in Hue for a couple, three days?
KB: Three days, I think.
LC: Ok. What else did you see –
KB: I did not get around much. I do have some pictures of some of the things that were destroyed, and strangely enough in that war, how others were left untouched and nobody knows why.
LC: And did you see any more of the actual fighting? Aside from your –
KB: No, I did not witness any face-to-face combat in Hue, but I’ve got some other stories to tell.
LC: Oh, ok. And who did you actually talk to when you called down to Saigon?
KB: I think I talked to Marinelli, mostly.
LC: And were you giving him Sit Reps on what was going on at that point?
KB: Yeah. Yeah. And he was passing them on; I’m sure, up the line to McManaway and ultimately, you know, to the command section.
LC: And were you – how would you describe what you were actually doing, what your position was while you were there in Hue; were you kind of guiding things through the last part of the conflict?

KB: In an informal, interim manner, they went about their business pretty much as they saw it; they would come and ask me for advice or come and tell me what they were doing. That’s where I came upon the idea that we had enough cement to pave the entire country of Vietnam. But to use it to build buildings, there was no money to buy roofs or put in doors or windows or whatever. And I came back and went and staffed an idea called Cash in Lieu of Cement. And we diverted millions of dollars away from the cement, and the cement lobby must have had a hell of an arm on the DOD for the amount of cement that was going to that country.

LC: Yeah, there was something, a CORDS program, I think, that was – what was it, two two five or something like that, or ten ten five where they’re giving out cement to refugees after TET?

KB: Yeah. Yeah. And we substantially revised the nature of that to put some money into the program so that something could be done with the cement.

LC: Ok. And this was all, as you said – as you indicate, American cement that was being shipped over there under contract?

KB: Yeah, and I don’t know the details of all of that, and I probably shouldn’t have made the comment that I did.

LC: No, it’s fine, it’s fine. I think I know where you’re going with that. Tell me, Kaye, was the time that you spent in Hue before or after the piaster flights?

KB: Before and after. That gives you a reference point.

LC: Yes it does.

KB: And what was the date that we said we had Hue? I don’t know, some time in mid-February.

LC: Right, maybe the 18th or something like that.

KB: Yeah.

LC: The mission continued, then. The piaster flights continued after you’d spent three days in Hue?

KB: Pardon me?
LC: The piaster flights continued after you had been in Hue.
KB: Yes, go ahead.
LC: Ok. Your piaster flights, what was the purpose of that money?
KB: To regenerate the economy.
LC: Ok. And it was being delivered to the local official, whoever –
KB: Yeah, the senior province chief.
LC: And under the –
KB: And what he did with it, who knows.
LC: Ok. Was there any kind of accounting being done around that money that you know of?
KB: Not that I’m aware of that I was involved in.
LC: Ok.
KB: I delivered it, left, and that was the last I heard of it.
LC: Ok. Can you say where the – where this handover of money fit into the general program that CORDS was developing for recovery from Hue – or, from the TET Offensive?
KB: Money talks. It was probably the most important, significant thing that happened to get the country back operating again. And I was just a little bitty guy in the middle of it.
LC: Uh-huh. And you were helping move the money around?
KB: Yes.
LC: And it was actually –
KB: And there must have been another counterpart or two of mine that I didn’t know about that went to the places I didn’t go.
LC: Ok.
KB: As I told you, I did most of the provinces in I Corps, which I think are like thirteen. And I think I did eight or ten in IV Corps. The delta.
LC: Ok. So there was another effort, probably, in other areas.
KB: Yeah, but not that I’m aware of, but I…you know.
LC: Where did the money actually come from when it – how did it get into the briefcase, do you know any of that?
KB: Yeah, the Vietnamese major went to the National Bank of South Vietnam, or whatever it was, at six o’clock in the morning and took it up and met me at the airplane at seven and we took off.

LC: And were you given any additional briefing on what you were supposed to do if, say, something went wrong?

KB: No.

LC: Nothing?

KB: No.

LC: Wow. But nothing ever really did go wrong, is that right? It was pretty smooth?

KB: Well, except for one time in the delta, I got in between a firefight, and a helicopter came in and pulled me out. That was a nice moment.

LC: Yeah, can you describe what happened on that day?

KB: Yeah, I think after we delivered the stuff to the – no, I was alone on that one. What was I doing down there? That wasn’t a money flight. That was just to go drink some coconut milk with the province chief and give him some guidance or hand him some papers or do something. Yeah, that wasn’t a money flight.

LC: Oh, ok. That must have been later on.

KB: But it was the same kind of thing.

LC: But, go ahead and –

KB: But after leaving him, and a jeep took me out to a helipad to be picked up, you know, in a few minutes or whatever, and on one side of that helipad there were VC and on the other side there were ARVN, and they decided they’d shoot at each other for a while. So I kind of kept a low profile til that helicopter came in.

LC: And what kind of helicopter was it? Was it a –

KB: It was an Army one, this time. It wasn’t Air America. And I think they came in with some suppressing fire to get me. Now I can’t tell you how many rounds were shot and that sort of thing, but it was an armed helicopter with machine guns and two guys manning the machine guns.

LC: And you were alone?

KB: Yeah.
LC: On the ground?
KB: Yeah.
LC: And you scrambled aboard, is that kind of how it went?
KB: Yeah.
LC: And they got you the you-know-what out of there?
KB: Out of there, yeah.
LC: Wow.
KB: Nice, nice minute.
LC: Yeah. Did you – where did they fly you to, do you know?
KB: Back to Saigon.
LC: Ok. Did you have a chance –
KB: Tan Son Nhut.
LC: Did you have a chance to speak to any of the guys on that flight?
KB: No. No, not really.
LC: Not really? Maybe to say thanks?
KB: Except to say thanks.
LC: Yeah, I was going to say.
KB: Yeah.
LC: And you never saw them again, I’m sure.
KB: No.
LC: Are you thinking, Kaye, that that was later on during your tour?
KB: That was immediately after TET, but it was not a money run. Now that I,
you know, really think about it.
LC: Ok, and…
KB: What else did I do? I spent some time on different flights, some of them the
cash trips, visiting with Green Berets and/or other Army units and there are some shots
in there of… I think one was the mess hall tent, the other one's a picture of a jeep or
whatever. So I was in the field, but I was not a comb- you know, I was not out there on
combat patrol.
LC: Right, sure. Sure.
KB: No heavy enemy action.
LC: Right. There were other guys who were doing that.
KB: Right, regular Army guys.
LC: When you went out to visit –
KB: Colin Powell was doing that while I was living in a life of luxury.
LC: And now look.
KB: But I was the Air Force John Kerry. Except I didn’t kill anybody.
LC: Well now, when you say you were the Air Force John Kerry, why do you say that?
KB: Oh, because I was out there in the middle of it. In the delta. I wasn’t on board his little boat.
LC: Right. But you know, you had your feet on the ground, and you were –
KB: But, I was on a couple of those riverine boats. Not in combat circumstances, but I’ve also got some pictures of that in the stuff that I sent you.
LC: When you would go out of Saigon on some of these trips, now not the money trips, but later on, what kind of missions did you have? Were these to get an observational view of what was happening?
KB: Yeah. Yeah. Observational view, and/or take some guidance, written instructions, or whatever. Verbal instructions that maybe I had been given from somebody.
LC: Ok. And were those usually related to CORDS activities?
KB: Yeah, yeah. CORDS activities. I never had anything to do with regular American military combat.
LC: Now Kaye, it’s said that in early May of 1968, there was kind of a mini-TET Offensive around Saigon and Giang province, and I wonder if you remember anything about that.
KB: I remember that there was, but I don’t think it was that big a deal.
LC: Ok.
KB: Or it wasn’t as far as I knew now. Maybe you’ve seen stuff that indicates that it was, but to my recollection it wasn’t that big a deal.
LC: I just wondered if it dislocated the recovery efforts at all, or if you remember anything.
KB: No, I don’t think so. Not from my perspective.

LC: Ok. And things then, after TET, things in the CORDS office, you would say, got back to business eventually?

KB: Yeah, we got heavily involved because we proved that there was some value to CORDS to the doubters, and so we put together the massive publication document to serve as the budget for 19...68, money had already been approve. It was for 1969. Which was a substantial increase, but I don’t think it ever happened as of what happened to the whole lessening of interest in the Vietnam situation, the resignation of President Johnson and that sort of stuff.

LC: Now do you remember hearing about his announcement that he was not going to run for another term?

KB: Yeah, I don’t think I got that in any official message traffic. I think the media broke that first.

LC: Ok. And what sort of media did you have access to? *Stars and Stripes*?

KB: *Stars and Stripes*.

LC: Uh-huh. Anything else?

KB: And there were a couple of local Saigon makeshift English newspapers.

LC: Ok. Soon thereafter, Bob McNamara left office as the Secretary of Defense and was replaced by Clark Clifford. Do you remember that at all?

KB: I remember that, but I think Clifford came to Vietnam, but I didn’t see him.

LC: Yes, I think he came in the summer of 1968, and you didn’t see him at all?

KB: No.

LC: Ok.

KB: I think I was aware of the fact that he was there. And I think an ex-buddy of mine was in the party and we visited by phone very briefly.

LC: Oh, ok. Do you remember a couple of other events of that spring and summer that happened in the States and if they had any effect on what you were doing or what you were seeing would be very interesting. For example, the death of Dr. Martin Luther King. I wonder if you remember that?

KB: Well, I was aware of that, but I don’t think that had any, in my observation or viewpoint, had any impact on what was happening in Vietnam.
LC: Ok.
KB: Now it may well have had elsewhere, or places I don’t know about, but…
LC: What about Robert Kennedy, who was seeking the democratic nomination at that time? Did you hear about that?
KB: Yeah, through the media.
LC: Again, nothing official?
KB: No big deal, no.
LC: Ok. And Kaye, were you aware of the escalating anti-war protests at this time in the States?
KB: I think I was generally aware of it. I knew about the Kent State thing or whatever it was, but it didn’t translate into anything that I received in terms of official guidance on what to do or what not to do, or any impact on what I was involved in.
LC: Ok. And I think as also the case in the spring and summer of 1968, Bill Colby was becoming more of a central figure within courts.
KB: Yeah, he moved up to be number two to Ellsworth Bunker, the titular ambassador, but Colby was the guy that was there on the day-to-day scene with General Westmoreland.
LC: Now you said earlier that you had met Colby a couple of times.
KB: A couple of times, yeah. Now I didn’t call him Bill, I called him Mr. Ambassador.
LC: Yes sir. Under what circumstances did you see him?
KB: In his office, when I would bring a paper and brief it.
LC: And did you stay with him for any length of time there, or just giving him an overview of the paper?
KB: Maybe five minutes.
LC: Did you have an impression of him that you could share with us?
KB: Yeah, great. In spite of all the things that had been said. He was a top-notch guy.
LC: He was very active here at Texas Tech, with the Vietnam Center here.
KB: Yeah.
LC: And yeah, I just wondered –
And I also met the admiral once. What’s his name?

LC: Zumwalt?

KB: Yeah, Zumwalt.

LC: Oh, you did?

KB: When he was in the Riverine Force, and I was involved in coordinating some transportation things.

LC: Ok, what was your impression of him, then?


LC: Yes sir. Yes sir.

KB: But, he was approachable. I called him General. He didn’t call me Kaye, either, I don’t think. And I think the reason I met him was I had arranged for Air America to take a commercial contractor who had barges operating in the delta, and I arranged for Air America to fly him over those assets so that he could assess what they were doing, and I think the reason I went to brief Zumwalt was to let him know that that was happening, so that his Riverine people would know what was going on.

LC: Yes, and not take any untoward action?

KB: Right.

LC: Why would – why were you employing Air America for that kind of job, do you remember?

KB: Air America did most of the work over there that was not involved in direct combat operations. There was some Air Force logistic capability with cargo planes and that sort of thing, but that was in support of the active military involvement. Everything that supported CORDS, with a few exceptions, like I said an Army helicopter picked me up once, was supported by Air America. As well as were most of the activities over Laos and Cambodia. These were one tough, brave group of guys.

LC: About how much, in the way of either personnel or aircraft assets did Air America have in Saigon that you knew about?

KB: I didn’t know about the total assets.

LC: Ok.
KB: I know there must have been two hundred pilots. How many aircraft, other than the ones I saw and flew on, I don’t know, but there must’ve been – oh, and one of the other ones that I flew on getting out of Da Nang. I never told you that story, did I?

LC: No, what happened there?

KB: I went up to Da Nang to do a staff visit before…before TET. I was up there I guess about three days, went onto the island where the Marine headquarters was of the Third Marine Amphibious Force, or whatever it was, and they ran the store. MACV may have thought that those Marines were under MACV, but the Marines did what they wanted to do when they wanted to do it and a hell of a good job. And in the CORDS area, they had their own – their own group. And we would share stuff with them, but they do it their way.

LC: What was the name of that group, do you remember? Or its activities, generally?

KB: Yeah, they were. I told you the Army groups name were Combined Action Platoons.

LC: Yes, that was the Army.

KB: There was a similar name in the Marine Corps, but it was different, and I can’t recall it right now.

LC: And they were –

KB: But they operated aside from the regular Marine, you know, heavy armor, heavy infantry attack units.

LC: And they were doing pacification?

KB: And they did good work.

LC: They were doing pacification-type work?

KB: Yup. Yeah, they would go out into villages and do medical stuff and help them build things and you know, all that kind of stuff.

LC: And that-

KB: A parallel operation of what CORDS was.

LC: And there was some communication there, but no control between the two?

KB: No control.
LC: Ok. But you did have some kind of liaison with them? At least during this mission?

KB: Yeah, during the time I was in Da Nang, and I think I had not really much liaison with them during the rest of the time.

LC: Ok. Now what about the CIA? Were they also involved in pacification efforts to some extent?

KB: Oh. Yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: One guy in my office in particular.

LC: Oh. Who was that?

KB: Can’t think of his name.

LC: Ok. But someone within Plans and Programs?

KB: Right.

LC: And he was like, liaison with what the CIA was doing?

KB: Yeah, what we called it then, the Office of the Special Assistant.

LC: Ok. And they had their own kind of program going?

KB: Yeah, and I don’t know much about it.

LC: Ok. Did you know anything about it?

KB: Yeah, that it was very intensive and they made independent assessments and studies from headquarters MACV, which at times were at odds.

LC: Ok. Did you see any of their traffic or reports any of that?

KB: Some. Some. Not a lot.

LC: And, while we’re on the subject, can I ask you –

KB: They were like the Marines, they operated on their own.

LC: They were kind of out there, huh?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Do you have any idea how many personnel were associated with their pacification efforts? If they were in Saigon, say? In the planning?

KB: No, I don’t, but the majority of the people that were out in the offices or in the field or that sort of thing were USAID people, and they were probably ten to fifteen thousand. I mean it was a big effort.
LC: And as you say, they were working on pacification things that paralleled what you were doing?

KB: Yeah, they’d do agriculture stuff, commerce stuff, you know, the real nitty-gritty work. We’d give them the guidance and they’d go do it.

LC: Ok. And during 1968 also, there was a growing initiative which you alluded to before called the Phoenix Program.

KB: Yeah.

LC: And I wonder if you can tell me anything about that.

KB: Yeah, that was interesting. I was told one day about that and then given very skimpy details of what it was, and said, ‘Set that up.’ And I saluted smartly and said, ‘Yes, sir.’ And then tried to figure out what that meant. And what it meant was that I supervised some remodeling of a balcony area over the back end of the USAID II building to make them a bunch of offices, and one day five of the meanest-looking Army military police guys showed up and said, ‘What do we do?’ And I said, ‘You go to your office and do whatever you’re supposed to do.’ Then I would coordinate with them a little bit. But I did not get involved in any direct operations and I didn’t kill anybody.

LC: And so what you were doing is making a set of offices for them to operate from?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. And then kind of, you know, just knowing they were there?

KB: There, coordinate with them as appropriate.

LC: Right.

KB: Phoenix was a pretty close-held operation.

LC: Yes. Yes, sir, and fairly small at that point.

KB: Yeah. Five guys.

LC: Yeah.

KB: But then there were lots of people…other things that were happening that they controlled out in the real Army. Long-range patrols, for example, were a part of Phoenix. The SEALs were part of Phoenix. The Green Berets were part of Phoenix. There was some other – there was a thing called the Studies and Observations Group, which sounds very innocuous. But they were deeply involved in black operations.
LC: And Kaye, did you know much about what was going on back there while it was happening?

KB: Probably not aware of the details or the impact of it that I’ve since learned about as I’ve read things. And I say, ‘Oh my God, I was there and I had a part of that.’

LC: Yeah.

KB: You know, a part of being involved in it.

LC: Just a small piece of administering.

KB: Administering, yeah, yeah. Exactly.

LC: And how do you feel about what you’ve learned about the program subsequently? A lot of this is in the secondary literature, a couple, three books written about it now. Have you given thought to that and does it trouble you at all?

KB: It probably troubles me, but I think it was necessary, but that it got out of hand on occasion is unfortunate, but what it was intended to do, to root out the infrastructure of Viet Cong controlled officials in cities, whether they were Viet Cong or not, is unfortunate, but it was necessary, and it probably had a lot of effect.

LC: Did you have anything to do with the growth of that program or oversee the growth of that program, in other words, more offices, more space, as the scope of the –

KB: No, I did not.

LC: Ok. And did those five guys stay in the USAID building?

KB: Yeah, as long as I was there.

LC: Ok, and then I’m sure you’re not aware of what happened after that.

KB: No.

LC: Was that staff growing while you were there? Did it grow from those five guys?

KB: I’m sure it was, but I didn’t participate in the growth of it.

LC: I see. Now I wanted to ask you also about some of the allies of the United States, and if you came across or had dealings with them.

KB: Oh yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: Australians were there. Didn’t do a lot from a combat standpoint that I’m aware of, but I think there have been things that have been written about what they did.
And as I say, the first couple of nights I was there, I had an Aussie lieutenant colonel for a roommate, but you know, we didn’t talk much about substantive things.

LC: Mm-hmm.

KB: The biggest one, and one I’m so happy is happening now. We had, I don’t know how many thousand, but substantial, like fifteen or twenty thousand Koreans. They were mean. They were big. They weren’t like, you know, little frail Koreans we think of as a stereotype. These guys were giants and the Viet Cong wouldn’t mess with them.

LC: Yeah, they were called the ROKs, weren’t they?

KB: Yup. Yup.

LC: In what capacity did you come across these guys?

KB: Well, I was involved in an organization initially that was called…what? Some kind of an acronym for all the countries that were involved in the Vietnam effort. They had periodic meetings until TET happened, and they were administrative in nature and would shake hands and do nothing, and I forget what that was, except I wore a special patch on one of my buttonholes for that thing, and I can’t remember what the name of it was. That was not too consequential, I don’t think, except I would meet some Koreans there.

LC: And this was some kind of diplomatic sort of –

KB: Oh, it was an official organization.

LC: But would you say more of a talking shop, or kind of a feel-good kind of a –

KB: Yeah. Yeah, as I saw it.

LC: Well, I think, sir, you’re probably in a position to know whether substantive things were, you know, happening or not.

KB: It met at the racetrack.

LC: It met at the racetrack?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. Can you describe that? Where was the racetrack?

KB: Racetrack was over by Cholon.

LC: And what – was there a meeting room, facilities there?

KB: It was a – you know, kind of a club-like thing.

LC: Ok, sure. Uh-huh.
KB: I don’t know if they actually had liquor and stuff, but they didn’t when we were there, but I think that’s where we met. In a conference room...no, it wasn’t a conference room, I think it was the open bar whatever area.

LC: Ok. And there were delegates from the different allied military forces there?

KB: Yes.

LC: As you said, there were some ROK military people there? And Australians?

And –

KB: New Zealanders.

LC: Ok. Anybody else?

KB: Yeah, whoever else was there, and I can’t remember.

LC: Well, South Vietnamese people maybe.

KB: No, I don’t think the South Vietnamese people participated in this group.

LC: Ok.

KB: Whatever other countries were there, and there weren’t many, and they didn’t have much impact.

LC: Ok. Any Filipinos there? Or…

KB: I think so.

LC: Maybe some Thais?

KB: Filipinos had a very, very big investment in Vietnam in terms of contracts.

LC: How do you mean?

KB: Like, I said the guy that I talked to you about that I arranged the trip to fly over all the barges in the delta? Well, that was just one little operation. But probably, other than Brown & Root, of current disrepute or whatever, the Filipinos had as much contracting and as much stuff going on, far less than Brown & Root of course, but had a lot.

LC: In what kinds of areas, shipping?

KB: Support.

LC: Road building?

KB: Logistics.

LC: Oh really?
KB: Road building, yeah. I think they were building the…have you got a loop around Lubbock?

LC: Yes we do.

KB: Like the 610 around Houston?

LC: Yes sir.

KB: Yeah, we were building that around Saigon. And it kind of got sidetracked when TET came on.

LC: Ok. Did they ever get back to that?

KB: I don’t know.

LC: But that was a primarily –

KB: I’ve never since seen it. I drove on part of it once. When it didn’t even have cement.

LC: Really?

KB: Yeah.

LC: What car were you using, do you remember?

KB: I think I had my little staff car and driver then.

LC: Ok.

KB: Because I wouldn’t have known how to get out of there if it hadn’t been for him.

LC: Ok.

KB: Mr. Hong. Nice little guy, I think he was a VC at night and my driver in the daytime.

LC: Ok. What made you think that?

KB: I don’t know, just one of those…

LC: Had a feeling?

KB: Yeah, gutsy feeling. No proof. No proof.

LC: About how old was he?

KB: He probably was thirty-five.

LC: Did he have a family, do you know?

KB: He did have. I never met them. He had a little motorcycle and I think he used to steal gas out of the car to run his motorcycle.
LC: That very well could be.

KB: In fact, one time I made him take out a contraption out of the trunk of the car that he later tried to tell me was his emergency supply in case we ran out of gas.

LC: Ah ha.

KB: Ah ha. Yeah.

LC: So the loop road that someone was giving thought to building around Saigon, that was you think Filipino contractors were handling some of that?

KB: I think so, but I don’t – I was not involved in that.

LC: Yeah. Yeah. That’s interesting.

KB: Just, you know. They were involved in those kinds of things. Logistical things.

LC: Ok. Infrastructure development for the country.

KB: Right.

LC: I want to ask in general, your impressions of the South Vietnamese military and political figures. Particularly the military people you met along the way. Did you -

KB: The military people I met were very professional. But at the top, I don’t think there was a professional or political commitment to do what they should do.

LC: Ok. Can you –

KB: Not to say they weren’t effective in many cases.

LC: Can you elaborate a little bit on what you mean?

KB: Yeah, I used to go to the ARVN mobilization meetings with a half a dozen general officers or colonels at least, but a fairly high-level representation of the Republic of Vietnam.

LC: Uh-huh. And these-

KB: And they were nice meet to greet, sit with a limited agenda that had nothing of any importance on it for an hour, and leave.

LC: Was it frustrating for you?

KB: Yeah.

LC: What about for other American, either military or civilian people that were around those kinds of meetings? Was there a general sense of frustration?

KB: Well generally speaking, the ones I went to, I was the only guy.
LC: Really?
KB: Yeah.
LC: Ok.
KB: Not that there weren’t lots of other important things going on elsewhere.
LC: No, sure, sure. But you just kind of felt a little frustrated with…
KB: Yeah. Yeah. The best guy that I ever saw had a kind of a non-essential task. He was a chief of a Vietnamese Army Research and Development department, and…do you want a story?
LC: Sure.
KB: Ok, he also happened to be the owner of a villa that a bunch of guys and I rented to get out of my crummy little tax building. And we had our own cook, Madam Baugh, and all that stuff, I think there were four or five of us, and he left us some machine guns and a few things, we had a telephone that he had arranged. And he wanted us to pay him in dollars and we wouldn’t, but that didn’t completely alienate the deal. And an old buddy of mine, Colonel Had Thompson, a fighter pilot who had completed his missions or whatever and came to Saigon to be in Ops, invited me to join that group, and I thought, ‘This is better than sitting alone in a crummy room.’
LC: Sure, yeah. Yeah.
KB: And so the Vietnamese colonel invited us one Sunday to go on a Research and Development ship. And it must have been, I don’t know, two hundred, three hundred feet long. It was a big ship. You got some pictures of it.
LC: Ok.
KB: And he took us – he didn’t, but he had a couple of Navy lieutenants who he let bring their families, their wives and their children, and we went up and down the Saigon River, and got to get into the little harbor of the Saigon zoo, which was a beautiful place, and I think that’s why he let the wives and the little kids come, because he got in there and – there’s a picture of me on the ground in there as a matter of fact.
LC: Right, yeah. Yeah.
KB: So that was kind of exciting.
LC: Do you remember much about the zoo? Can you describe it?
KB: Didn’t see that much. Not much more than the picture shows. No one was allowed in the zoo, and we were probably in there if anybody knew it, they’d have come and grabbed us, so we didn’t do anything but go in and take those pictures and sit there for a few minutes and look around and then leave.

LC: Was it busy when you were there?

KB: No, there was nobody in it.

LC: There was no one there?

KB: Well, except the caretakers. The guys feeding the animals.

LC: Why was it so deserted?

KB: For security reasons.

LC: Was –

KB: Viet Cong could have come right through that rascal.

LC: Really.

KB: Oh, yeah.

LC: Was it ever attacked, to your knowledge? Do you know?

KB: Not to my knowledge.

LC: Ok. But the –

KB: The Viet Cong never got across the river to that side of the Saigon River in that immediate area. Now they were obviously all over the city.

LC: Right. Right. That’s interesting. The zoo comes up quite a bit.

KB: Does it?

LC: Yeah, people used to go there in the earlier years.

KB: Oh, ok, yeah. In the earlier years.

LC: Yeah, as a kind of, you know, sort of haven within the city kind of thing.

KB: Yeah. Yeah. It was beautiful.

LC: Yeah. Do you remember any of the animals that they had there?

KB: No, I don’t think we saw animals. We weren’t in that part.

LC: Ok. You saw caretakers kind of moving around, doing their thing, huh?

KB: One or two.

LC: Really. Ok.
KB: Because if they had seen us, they would have thrown us out. Well, I don’t know what they would have done.

LC: But the head of the R&D department that made this excursion possible, what was it about him that impressed you, that made you think differently about him than other people that you came across in the ARVN?

KB: I guess maybe because I knew him on a conversational level that he appeared to be a very professional, dedicated kind of guy. But he didn’t have much of a job, so he didn’t make much impact on anybody.

LC: Interesting. Did he ever talk to you about his career or why he was in R&D?

KB: No. We never got to those kind of discussions.

LC: I see. Well let me ask you about a couple of other figures that I don’t know whether you actually ever saw them, but maybe you have some kind of an opinion about how they functioned and so forth, and the first of those is General Westmoreland.

KB: I never met him. I was in his command headquarters, you know, suite, lots of times, but I never had a case to see him face-to-face.

LC: Did you have an impression that you formed either while you were there or in the subsequent years about his command in Vietnam?

KB: Well I of course had nothing but positive thoughts about it when I served underneath him.

LC: Yes sir.

KB: And I know he’s been very controversial. And I have not really studied that enough to take an opinion, but I guess if you were to ask me which way I would lean, it would be in favor of him having done a hell of a job.

LC: Ok. What about Creighton Abrams, who took his place?

KB: Did not know him personally or operate under him that long. I don’t recall when he came in. You may know, but I think it was toward the end of ’68.

LC: Yes, I think that’s right. And General Westmoreland went to DC as Chief of Staff, I believe.

KB: Yeah.

LC: I could be wrong on that.

KB: No, I think you’re right.
LC: Also, there’s another figure about whom a very popular book has been written by Neil Sheehan, and he was I think associated with CORDS and III Corps, that’s John Vann.

KB: Oh yeah, John Paul Vann?

LC: Yeah.

KB: Yeah. Oh, what a renegade he was.

LC: Do you know – did you know him?

KB: He was a retired Army lieutenant colonel.

LC: Yes, sir.

KB: That just talked his way because he was so knowledgeable. But he was so forward that he held that CORDS III position as the equivalent of a two-star general.

LC: Yes sir. That’s right.

KB: I met him twice.

LC: Ok.

KB: And he’s everything he’s cracked up to be, in my opinion.

LC: Really?

KB: Yeah.

LC: What was your – go ahead and tell me your impression. What circumstances did you meet him, and what were your impressions of him?

KB: I think I met him once when he came to Saigon, I was in a meeting with him, had a brief aside, and the other time I didn’t go to his headquarters… But I saw him once after that, he recognized me, you know, we had met before, not close friends, didn’t eat lunch together, and talked briefly again. And he just exuded everything that he was supposed to be, rough, tough, take-charge, don’t give me any crap, and a womanizer.

LC: Is that right?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: But, you know, don’t write that down.

LC: No, sir –

KB: Well I guess you have to, I said it.

LC: Well, I don’t think it’s a secret.
KB: Yeah.
LC: Yeah. And now – Ambassador Bunker you mentioned before. Can you fill out the picture about him a little bit more?

KB: I went to a party at his house once. Pre-TET.

LC: And –

KB: Assume that I shook his hands in a receiving line, and that was the extent of it.

LC: Did you meet his wife? Do you know?

KB: No. I know she was there at times, but I don’t think she was there at that particular time.

LC: Ok. Did you have any opinion about how he was doing his job? Maybe you couldn’t express it then, but about his relationship with the South Vietnamese government or with General Westmoreland?

KB: Yeah, I think he probably had a pretty good political understanding of the various and sundry – well when I was there, I think we had three different premiers or presidents or whatever they’d call them.

LC: Yes. Yes sir.
KB: Chi and one of the big Thieus and the little Thieu maybe, I don’t know.

LC: I think that’s right, sir.

KB: And he probably handled that aspect of things great. I don’t think he messed around much with Westmoreland, he let Westmoreland run the military part of the show.

LC: Now, what about Bob Komer? Did you –

KB: He left shortly after I got there.

LC: Ok, who was he – he was replaced Colby then.

KB: Colby, yeah.

LC: Ok. And he went back – Komer went back to Washington.

KB: No, he went to be the ambassador to Iran.

LC: I beg your pardon, you’re right, sir. Did things –

KB: Which was big-time stuff, then. That was considered, in the big scheme of things, more important at that time than was Vietnam. And for reasons that we have yet to learn.
LC: Right. That story continues to unfold, I guess. That was in some way kind of a reward to him, do you think?

KB: I think so, yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: And a need for his skills that maybe didn’t work out.

LC: I think you might be right there.

KB: I think they fired him. Right? Or, I think the Iranians asked for him to be returned when they found out what a strong character was. But I don’t know that for a fact.

LC: Ok. Now did – you said that you had met him once or twice or saw him?

KB: Yeah. Once to actually talk to, and maybe once in a staff meeting, you know, that he acknowledged that I was there.

LC: What kind of a guy was he?

KB: Just like he’s painted to be.

LC: Which is, in general…?

KB: Cocky, arrogant, but so Goddamn smart you don’t really realize that he’s cocky and arrogant.

LC: You don’t mind quite so much.

KB: No.

LC: Because he’s actually got something to back it up.

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: And he was a great personal buddy of his likewise character personnel John Vann. Peas in a pod.

LC: Is that right?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. And they did get along well, do you think?

KB: Yeah, that’s probably why Vann got the job.

LC: I see, ok.

KB: I don’t know that either.
LC: Uh-huh. Now Vann's position, was he actually the CORDS, the primary CORDS person within III Corps?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok.

KB: The Marine was I Corps. Who did we talk about a few minutes ago? Weyand? Was III Corps, and IV Corps was a Navy admiral whose name I don’t know if I ever really consciously paid any attention to.

LC: Ok. When you would go out your travels out from Saigon, was it part of your brief to stop in with the CORDS HQs in the different Corps areas?

KB: Not always.

LC: Ok, but some –

KB: The money trips were money only. On the ground ten, fifteen minutes.

LC: Ok.

KB: If one of them happened to be there, I would talk to him. But like I say, in some cases, we don’t know who we gave the money to. I’m sure the Vietnamese major knew it was an official person.

LC: Right, they probably had their own system of checking and double-checking.

KB: Yeah. Yeah. May have been his brother-in-law.

LC: Did you understand, Kaye, why you were on those flights?

KB: No. They needed some dummy that knew a little bit about what was going on but who was expendable. No, that’s not true.

LC: I was going to say, that doesn’t sound quite right. But -

KB: No, but I don’t know the selection for that.

LC: Ok, you don’t know –

KB: I was an Air Force guy, the only one in all of CORDS. There were a number of – not a large number, but a number of Army guys, no Navy guy, no Marine, and so why not send the Air Force guy?

LC: Ok. You think maybe that had something to do with it?

KB: Yeah, I think it did.

LC: Ok. When moving now towards the second half of your time in Vietnam –

KB: Pretty uneventful, but go ahead.
LC: Ok. Well, I just wondered if there were certain events or trips away from Saigon, or maybe things that happened in the city that you remember that it might be good to add here.

KB: No, the high point was really TET and the trips that I took as far as things that stand out. The rest of my time was fairly substantial, normal staff work. I stayed putting together the master plan for 1969, which was a book that I don’t know, was six inches thick or something.

LC: And that was the justification for the budget, essentially?

KB: Right. Right. Right.

LC: Ok. And it argued for expansion?

KB: Yes.

LC: Of CORDS particularly?

KB: CORDS particularly, yeah.

LC: And –

KB: Because CORDS saw themselves as the key to success.

LC: And how do you evaluate now with a great deal of perspective what CORDS actually achieved, either while you were there or in total?

KB: It was on the way to achieving a lot. It probably had some major successes in certain areas, but we lost the war.

LC: Right. Why did that happen? Why did we lose the war, sir?

KB: Because the American will to fight the war disappeared.

LC: Was that a problem of politics inside the U.S. rather than of military operations on the ground?

KB: Oh, yeah. TET was a tremendous military success for the United States, but it was never portrayed that way in the American press.

LC: And can you say a bit more about the press and what happened to the war effort as a consequence of their coverage? Do you have a particular take on how the press covered the war?

KB: I think the press has covered the Iraq War far more balanced than they did the Vietnamese War, and primarily because of the embedded reporter scene. They – ok, another story.
LC: Ok.

KB: I used to have drinks on occasion, not regularly, we weren’t you know, that close of buddies, but with the kid on CBS, kid to me, he’s my age, we were kids then.

LC: Not the anchor?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Dan Rather?

KB: Dan Rather. Yeah.

LC: Oh really?

KB: And those other guys. On the, and I’m looking at it right now, on the veranda of the Continental Palace. Which you have a picture of.

LC: Yes sir.

KB: Yeah. And what do I say it taught me a thing? Favorite watering hole of journalists like Dan Rather and others where I frequently had a drink. And that’s where they would sit and write their stories about what they never saw.

LC: Did you speak do Dan Rather?

KB: Yeah.

LC: What do you remember the flavor of those exchanges?

KB: He was a nobody then, you know.

LC: Yes, I think that’s, yeah.

KB: Well, he wasn’t a nobody, but he was just another little reporter.

LC: Right, that’s right.

KB: And so, I was a major. And he would talk to me in a civil tone. And we had, you know, no substantive conversations or anything and probably – that was an overstatement, they sat there with a drink writing up what they never saw about, but it ain’t too far from the truth, either.

LC: Ok, ok. Do you remember some of the other reporters who you saw there? Or, around town?

KB: Nobody that was a big name, no. Rather’s the only one that stands out.

LC: Mm-hmm. But perhaps others who –

KB: Oh, I’m sure there were others there. Yeah. They lived in the Caravel Hotel. The best hotel. And it was across the street from the Continental Palace, and the
Continental Palace was kind of nice because in the afternoon, after the rain, and the breeze came in, it was a pleasant place to sit.

LC: And so they – a lot of them kind of hung out in these hotels and –

KB: In two places, two places, yeah.

LC: Did you –

KB: My JUSPAO buddy once got me an invite to go to the top floor of the Caravel Hotel – because it was closer to the river – to watch the fighting across the river, and boy that was an interesting afternoon.

LC: And how long were you up there, do you know

KB: Oh, two or three hours.

LC: What’d you see?

KB: Oh, everything. All kinds of aircraft hitting ground emplacements.

LC: Yeah.

KB: No. I don’t believe anybody was on the Saigon River, the Navy, in that operation. That was mostly Air Force. Giant explosions.

LC: And who was your buddy over at JUSPAO? Do you remember?

KB: Can’t think of his name.

LC: Ok.

KB: I went to school with him at Ft. Bragg, and we never had contact after Vietnam.

LC: As you think back on it, that coursework at Ft. Bragg at the JFK school actually set you up very well for what you encountered, or not?

KB: No, not at all.

LC: Really?

KB: Not at all. It was primarily psychological orientation, so we went there convinced it was a real war, we had to fight, it wasn’t a civil war, and we were supposed to believe some of the things that have since been proven untrue, like what about the Gulf of Tonkin incident? There’s many aspects to that story as you want, but it was a thing the administration hung their hat on to go into Vietnam full force, as did weapons of mass destruction initially lead Bush to that, that he’s now trying to back away from.

LC: Right.
KB: Boy, too political, I’d better be careful.

LC: No, that’s ok, well, I mean, you can say whatever you have on board to say, really. I wanted to ask you also, sir, did you get any medals or citations?

KB: Yeah. I sent you a list, didn’t I?

LC: Yes. Yes you did.

KB: The biggest one was a bronze star.

LC: Yes sir. Can you tell about the circumstances?

KB: That was for the trips to the field on the money deals and the other operations that I was involved in under combat conditions.

LC: And were there any particular events that the award of that medal was tied to? For example, the time that you came –

KB: I suppose the Hue trip, maybe the gun battle incident in the delta, but the trips in general. The fact that I was out in the field with my feet on the ground.

LC: Right. And sir, are you proud of having got those citations?

KB: Oh, of course. And the one other one that I got was a Republic of Vietnam medal, first class, which wasn’t a giveaway like so many others were. And I got that for my work with the Vietnamese.

LC: And –

KB: That’s special; there probably aren’t many of them out there.

LC: Yes sir, I think that’s correct. I frankly have never seen any listing of an award of those for anyone that I’ve talked to. And you think that was for the cooperative efforts that you led from CORDS to South Vietnamese government officials?

KB: Correct.

LC: Ok. I want to ask you a couple of questions about Vietnam that really focus on and draw out from your personnel experience. Sir, as you know, almost everyone who shipped over there in any kind of military capacity served a one-year tour, and that distinguished the Vietnam conflict from previous American conflicts, for example World War II, when you were in the service, you were in until you were let go. In fact, until the conflict was over. And I wonder, do you think this was a strength or a weakness of personal –

KB: Weakness. Weakness.
LC: Why would that be?

KB: No continuity.

LC: Ok.

KB: People come and go every day.

LC: Uh-huh.

KB: There’s no camaraderie, or little camaraderie. The organizations, the military organizations were not as well trained as they should have been. The concept now that we’re doing is to send in a division for a year and pull them out and send another one is much better.

LC: Ok, because it keeps the unit together? Over the course of the conflict?

KB: Right, yeah.

LC: And in your mind, as a personnel expert, did this undermine efficiency and proficiency?

KB: Oh, you bet. Think about the fraggings we had. Have you heard of any of those in Iraq yet?

LC: No, sir.

KB: Well, probably because we don’t talk about it, but I don’t think they happen.

LC: That could be. Did you come across examples of that kind of misconduct while you were over there?

KB: Not personally.

LC: Did you hear about it though?

KB: Yes. My three guys, I’m sure, had their snorts of whatever it was was the popular drug, but it never affected their duty performance.

LC: By your three guys, who do you mean?

KB: My three enlisted guys.

LC: Oh, ok. These were aides to you?

KB: No, they were my sergeant, administrative sergeant, and the two guys that assisted him and did all the running and…

LC: They executed what you told them to execute, basically.

KB: Well, yeah, from a logistical and – they didn’t have any part in doctrine or guidance of formal military, you know, that kind of stuff.
LC: Right. But you dispatched them on certain things to do.

KB: Yeah, my sergeant and his two sidekicks that did what I told them to do, or…

LC: Right. Now were those the same guys – were those same men assigned to you throughout the time you were there, or did they also rotate?

KB: Yeah, the whole period of time.

LC: Ok.

KB: Yeah, they were there when I got there, and were still there when I left at the best of my recollection, although a guy emailed me the other day and said, ‘It was my pleasure to serve under you, sir,’ and I don’t remember him.

LC: Really?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Did it make you feel good, though, that he remembered you?

KB: Yeah. Yeah.

LC: Yeah. Sir, another –

KB: I told you, one of those kids, the father was a previous ambassador.

LC: Oh.

KB: Remember that?

LC: Durbrow?

KB: Yes.

LC: He was the one who emailed you?

KB: No.

LC: Oh, ok. But he one that –

KB: The guy emailed me, I don’t remember him being there, but maybe he was.

LC: I’m sorry, sure. Sir, I want to ask you about another area, again personnel administration-wise, that came I think to the fore – in the time that you were over there and the years subsequently within the U.S. military, and that has to do with race relations.

KB: Yeah. I didn’t do anything in race relations in Vietnam. I do not think we had a big race relations problem from my perspective, but I read numbers or reports about how there were problems out in the field units.

LC: Uh-huh. But that was in the course –
KB: Now, if you want to talk about race relations, I’ve got a whole story on that for you that will take up probably – not today.

LC: Ok.

KB: If you’re interested.

LC: Yes, I’m very interested. I’ll make a note and we’ll talk about it maybe next time.

KB: Good.

LC: But you didn’t – the reports that you saw while you were in Vietnam were basically material that you came across in the course of your reading and monitoring of the tracking.

KB: Yeah, I did not have any personal – personal knowledge of a fragging, I did not have any personal knowledge of the My Lai – My Lai, however you say it, massacre.

LC: Right. Did you though just in then course of –

KB: I don’t think that even happened when I was there.

LC: No, I think that’s correct, I think that was later, in ’69, after you had left. But while you were there, just in the course of you know, just being around military people in Saigon and out in the field when you would go out on your trips, did you ever catch something that you felt was about race, just on the edge of a remark, or something like that? Did you ever make any observations?

KB: No, because most of my trips, I never saw another American.

LC: Ok.

KB: Except for the province senior advisor who would be a lieutenant colonel and you know, probably was above the fray on that stuff.

LC: Yes, ok. So it just didn’t hit the radar.

KB: It was a non-entity to me personally.

LC: Ok, it just didn’t hit your radar.

KB: In Vietnam.

LC: But otherwise –

KB: Plenty of experience with it since then.
LC: Yes, sir. And you know, I do want to have a chance to talk to you about those other events, because the entirety of your career is of interest to us. As you were getting closer to...well actually first, I want to ask you if you went on any R&Rs.

KB: Yeah, I went to Hawaii in I think July, I met my wife for what’d we get...five days R&R or something?

LC: Uh-huh.

KB: Yeah. That was kind of nice.

LC: Yeah.

KB: Very, very nice. What an interesting incident from there.

LC: Sure, what happened?

KB: We came up to our room to take a nap, and you know, dumb guy, I knew I was going to change clothes, so I took all of the stuff out of my pockets, including my wallet, and put them on the dresser, which was near to the door. Well, you know, I’m a non-suspecting guy, and they were stolen. We reported it to the house management, cops swarmed the place, nobody was found, but my billfold was in a potted plant. With the money in it.

LC: With the money still in it?

KB: Yup.

LC: Did they take anything?

KB: No.

LC: Nothing?

KB: Well, they took the billfold, but the cops got there so fast that they made their break and didn’t have time to take the – well, it wasn’t that much money in it anyways.

LC: Yeah. But they didn’t steal your ID or anything?

KB: No. No, fortunately.

LC: Yes. Yes. Was it tough for you to leave your wife again after the R&R was over?

KB: I’m sure it was, but I’m not that kind of guy.

LC: Ok, and when you returned back to Saigon, was the adjustment fine for you?

You just kind of went back to work?
KB: Yeah, just went back to work. Next day was work.
LC: Ok. And, you know, a lot of Vietnam veterans, many of whom were not as
senior as you of course have talked about getting short, and meaning getting towards the
time when they would rotate out of the country, and I wonder if you had it in your mind
at all as you approached December of 1968?
KB: I don’t think I had a calendar that I marked off the days, but I did arrange to
get out of there one week short of my fifty-two weeks.
LC: How did that happen?
KB: Well, I was kind of in control of things.
LC: Ok, so –
KB: And I felt that it was not shirking my duty, things were at kind of a low ebb,
my replacement was there, and so I just booked the plane.
LC: Who was your replacement, sir?
KB: Can’t remember his name.
LC: Ok, was – but he was Air Force, obviously.
KB: Yeah, he was. That was an Air Force billet. He was Air Force guy.
LC: Ok. And do you remember where he was coming from?
KB: No.
LC: Was he a major?
KB: Yes.
LC: Ok. And sir, when were you due for promotion? Do you know?
KB: Well, I was a major then, I guess. You make major at about thirteen to
fourteen years. No you don’t, you make it at about…let me think. I know, you’ve got
the dates of rank.
LC: Sure. I was just wondering if you were moving –
KB: My officer effectiveness reports that I managed to get two of helped me be
promoted substantially to lieutenant colonel.
LC: Yes sir. Yes sir. And when did that –
KB: Also, I also did some other good work.
LC: And what work would that be, sir?
KB: Well, I’ll tell you later.
LC: Oh, ok.

KB: No, I’ve been fortunate enough to have been in command executive or command related jobs out of the mainstream of the Air Force for much of my career. In fact, I think I’ve spent a fourth of my career in joint service environments, so I’ve had a lot of unique opportunities for high-level recognition.

LC: And indeed, the work you were doing in Vietnam was very high-level work for a major to be doing. Would you agree?

KB: Yeah, it was, yeah. Yeah.

LC: Because I think at the beginning you mentioned that there were a couple of people from other branches of the service who were also in the Plans and Programs group.

KB: Yeah, they were primarily backroom guys that dealt with dollars.

LC: Right. And they were –

KB: Didn’t have the visibility that I did.

LC: Right. And they were in rank above you, even though they were of course –

KB: One lieutenant colonel, one major, then there was another lieutenant colonel who was over on our Ops site if you want to call it that. His name was Granicher, I remember that. Lieutenant Colonel Granicher.

LC: Ok. Do you know how –

KB: And he was kind of a – I’m sure he was a very competent, capable guy. But he was very low-key, and I’d tell him, you know, ‘Hey Granicher, how about you handling this?’ And he would go do it.

LC: Huh.

KB: But he didn’t have the visibility at headquarters MACV, that sort of stuff that I did.

LC: Ok.

KB: But he was a very good guy, I’m sure.

LC: But, you know, sir you held very responsible position there within CORDS, you know, at major it’s really quite remarkable the work that you did.
KB: Yeah, there were two Army lieutenant colonels that worked for Clay McManaway, sat outside his desk, one guy would coordinate on everything with his green pen, and if anybody used a green pen anywhere else, they were in trouble.

LC: Ok.

KB: But those two guys were paper pushers. They never – well, they didn’t go with me when I took a paper to the command section to brief it. They were there –

LC: They were- they took root.

KB: Yeah.

LC: And you were out and about, it sounds like.

KB: Yeah. Up and down the halls.

LC: Uh-huh. And sir, when you left Vietnam in December of 1968, do you remember actually the day you left?

KB: Yeah, they had a party for – no, the day before.

LC: The day before?

KB: Yeah, because I left early in the morning, six o’clock in the morning. So the day before, I came back after lunch and the secretaries had put streamers all over the place, and bon voyage, and all that kind of stuff. And no champagne, though.

LC: No champagne, huh?

KB: Yeah, son of a gun.

LC: Yeah, that’s kind of a rook.

KB: Yeah, that was nice.

LC: And you mentioned –

KB: And I think in addition to the twenty-five guys and gals in my operation who all were there to say bon voyage, a number of the directors of the other things like the public safety guy and the Psy Ops guy and those guys came by and said, ‘It’s been a pleasure working with you.’

LC: And so –

KB: So that was kind of nice.

LC: Yeah, that made you feel pretty good.

KB: Yeah.

LC: You mentioned the gals –
KB: But not good enough to extend.
LC: Well, right, yeah.
KB: They wanted me to resign my commission and take a state department temporary appointment and stay there. And I said, no thanks.
LC: And why did you reject that kind offer?
KB: Oh, family, I guess.
LC: Ok.
KB: And the instability. You know, I was a regular officer, I knew I had a place to hang my hat in a retirement.
LC: Right. And what they were –
KB: I felt reasonably confident that I did.
LC: And what they were offering was certainly not –
KB: Probably very temporary in nature, particularly as the war wore down and there wouldn’t have been any job at all.
LC: Did you ever have cause to regret that decision?
KB: No.
LC: Ok. Sir, I want to ask you about the gals in the office you mentioned. The secretaries. They were civilians?
KB: Yes.
LC: Employed by the State Department?
KB: By the Agency for International Development.
LC: Ok. Do you remember their names at all, sir?
KB: No.
LC: Ok. Or where they were from?
KB: No.
LC: About how old were they?
KB: Thirties, I guess.
LC: Ok. Just trying to get a sense of some of the women that served in the…
KB: They were kind of courageous people to be over there. Of course when they went, it was kind of a plush assignment I guess, but when TET hit, that was kind of a dangerous place for a young, single woman to be making her way around the city.
LC: Yes sir. It was. And it’s important that we acknowledge that the civilians, you know, the civilians that were over there and did expose themselves to the danger. So I’m glad you mentioned that.

KB: Yeah. CORDS was almost a hundred percent civilian employees. Of one part of the government or not. Or another.

LC: Yes, that’s right, yeah. And they were working primarily in civilian operation. I mean, they were trying to work the pacification side of the game.

KB: That’s right.

LC: Yeah. Sir, where did you go when you came back from Vietnam?

KB: Went to Dyess Air Force base in Texas. And we can talk a little bit about that.

LC: Ok, sure. What was your assignment there?

KB: I was the director of personnel.

LC: For the entire base?

KB: For the entire base. Two major wings. A B-52 wing with 130 transports and a Tactical Airlift Command wing with C-130s, the trash haulers, as they said.

LC: How many aircraft were based there, do you know?

KB: Maybe fifty…fifty C-130s, maybe thirty-six, I think that was the unit strength on the B-52s, and fifteen refuelers.

LC: Ok. And what was it like for you to adjust being – to being back in the States?

KB: Oh, I don’t think there was any adjustment at all, except I’m glad to be there.

LC: Ok.

KB: Abilene, where Dyess is, was rather a dull town. It had no – except for the little one block city called Impact, you couldn’t buy a drink.

LC: Yes sir.

KB: Except on the base. And so we had lots of people that wanted to be close on the military-civilian advisory committee, because they could get to come to the base and have a drink.

LC: Right.
KB: That’s on the lighter side. They had a very good relationship with the military and they continue to have at Dyess. I monitor that on a frequent basis in my various roles in the Air Force Association, which we may or may not have an opportunity to talk about.

LC: Ok, I’ll make a note of that. The work that you did on the base, could you describe it?

KB: Everything.

LC: Ok.

KB: Ran the clubs, the golf courses, the library, the mess hall; no, I didn’t do the mess halls. And all the personnel administration. It was a much greater job in those days that the equivalent job is this day, where they split out the various – the specific personnel-related responsibilities from running the clubs and the golf courses and the gyms and all that kind of stuff.

LC: Right. Would you say it’s more stratified now?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. And what’s the impact of that that you’ve seen over the course of your…

KB: It probably was a good thing, even though I hated to give it up, but it was just too much for one guy to really, effectively handle.

LC: Yeah. Just the load.

KB: Yeah.

LC: It was too much. And how long were you actually at Dyess?

KB: I think a year and a half.

LC: Ok. Into 1971?

KB: 1970…

LC: Or 1970?

KB: 1970. Yeah, ok. Let’s talk quickly about Dyess, because it doesn’t take much talk.

LC: Sure, ok.

KB: Routine assignment because of the level and the breadth of responsibility, a very, very successful tour from a satisfaction standpoint, close interaction on a daily basis
with a wing commander who fortunately held me in pretty good esteem. And then the
other wing commander, which is unusual on a base, from another major command, the
same kind of relationship. Got some pretty nice performance reports out of there.

LC: Ok.

KB: I would’ve liked to have stayed longer. As far as the job was concerned,
wasn’t that thrilled with Abilene.

LC: Right.

KB: Don’t tell my buddies from Abilene that.

LC: Ok.

KB: But was very pleasantly surprised when I was selected for a plum
assignment in the military personnel community to become the detachment commander
of the 1141st Squadron, what, it’s got a big name. Special Act- USAF Special Activities
Squadron. Which was the organization located in Stuttgart, Germany, it had the
responsibility for the support of all of the NATO units in Europe. I was in support of
headquarters 4th Allied Tactical Air Force at Rammstein.

LC: Which I think most people –

KB: Which we can talk about in the next fifteen minutes, if you’ve got fifteen
minutes left.

LC: Sure. Absolutely, let’s go.

KB: Alright. I told you what it was.

LC: Yes. And you said it was a plum assignment.

KB: Plum assignment, in view because it was the only one that was on an
American military base, but it was completely separate from the base. We and 4th Allied
Tactical Air Force didn’t participate in exercises that the base people had when they put
on their flak jackets and stuff, we strolled around with our 4ATAF proudly. 4ATAF felt
strongly about physical conditioning because it was a multinational command, and
Wednesday afternoons were time off for athletics, theoretically.

LC: Ok.

KB: I doubt many people did much except go to the golf course, but anyway.

LC: Ok.
KB: That was one of the things completely independent. My boss was a full colonel in Stuttgart. I would talk to him maybe once a week. I actually worked on a daily basis for a brigadier general who was a director of operations and the senior American officer in 4ATAF. Had the unique relationship with them that when I wanted to talk to them, the door was open, and they never bothered me. I ran the store. Nice, nice, nice job.

LC: Yeah, that sounds pretty good.

KB: Yeah.

LC: What was your relationship like with others in the multinational command? Can you describe some of that?

KB: Yeah, I think I had a pretty good ongoing relationship with the other military people, whether they’d be American or other countries in the areas where I had people functionally working. Like, for example, security policemen. I had a good relationship with the American colonel who was in charge of the multinational security function. Probably the one I interfaced with most and had even more contact, maybe than he did, with his people in the field was the colonel that was in charge of the communications element, whatever it was called. And I had the administrative and command responsibility for the people at the half a dozen or so radar site locations that came under his technical prerogative. And I probably visited them as much as he did. To look out for their health, welfare, and morale.

LC: Oh. How many times did you go out on visits like that?

KB: Oh, probably once every two months.

LC: Really?

KB: I’d cover the six of them at least once a year.

LC: Did you make it a point to get out there once a year –

KB: Twice a year.

LC: Twice a year? Oh, I’m sorry. And have kind of hands-on observation?

KB: Yeah. Stay for a day or two. See what they needed. Like one time, some of the places were so threadbare that I made a special request for I don’t know how many thousands of dollars to the USAF welfare fund to get enough carpet to carpet all those
places. In fact when we cut it up, there was enough left over to carpet my office,
coincidentally, I don’t know how that worked out.

LC: This sounds a little bit like the days in the early ‘60s when you were in
Germany previously.

KB: Yeah. Except I was the head guy this time.

LC: Yeah, now you’re on top of the heap.

KB: Yeah.

LC: But going out and visiting, at that time, the missile sites.

KB: Yeah.

LC: It sounds like –

KB: Very similar, yeah.

LC: And did you enjoy being in Germany again?

KB: Oh yeah, Germany was great.

LC: Ok.

KB: Only thing was, I didn’t get to travel as much as I would have liked to
because of the demands of the job were, you know, I gave up half my leave every year
because I just needed to be there.

LC: And this was much more, sort of 24/7, that they say now.

KB: Yeah, it kind of was. Yeah. If that term existed then, it wasn’t I sat there at
my desk or was out there in the field twenty-four hours a day, but I was on call 24/7.

LC: Sure. And it sort of sounds from your description like you enjoyed doing it,
though.

KB: I did. And that’s where the race relations and drug and alcohol awareness
challenges were very, very heavy.

LC: Ok. Can you talk a little bit, just in general terms about, say the race
relations issue?

KB: Yeah. In my particular group, because it was a highly select group,
everyone had to have what we call an SSIR investigation. Special Intelligence
Requirements investigation. I had the cream of the crop of people.

LC: Ok.
KB: We did not have any women at that point in time. I did not have that much
of a problem in race relations in my organization because I took a lot of pre-emptive
measures to avoid it. I had an NCO advisory council that I convened once a month to
talk about these kinds of issues, make sure they weren’t a problem. Or if they saw one
somewhere, they had knowledge to deal with it or knew where they could go to get the
professional help. As a matter of fact, my program was emulated by the host base, where
they had more problems because they had a more diverse element and a lot more people.

LC: Ok.

KB: So, I had a lot of hands-on work on that, even did some things when I got
back in the States in the civilian community, working in that area.

LC: Ok. Well maybe we can explore some of that next time.

KB: Yeah. I don’t think there’s an awful lot to explore, except I was very
knowledgeable, aware of that and because of that, I like to think, didn’t have many
problems.

LC: And you developed a kind of proactive approach.


LC: Ok.

KB: You got it.

LC: Ok. Sir, let’s take a break.

KB: Let’s do.